The Community Action Plan on Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth

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A report of the

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and the

Regional Advisory Committee on Food & Shelter

in Partnership with the

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a brief overview of the "Community Action Plan on Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth". It was developed from extensive consultations with the community throughout the winter, spring and summer of 2000, and from research into the crisis that is homelessness. It is meant to reflect the voices that were heard during those consultations, and to be used to guide the Community Advisory Board and Social and Public Health Services of the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth as they fund new projects, and by community agencies and groups developing projects for funding.

The Community Action Plan is a dynamic document that will evolve over the years of the Plan as innovative ideas are added and current recommendations for action are modified. This Plan is not intended to speak solely to the resources for the Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) fund. It is a community plan that, if followed over a number of years, will address homelessness. Even after the 3-year window of SCPI closes, it will be the responsibility of this community to continue to move ahead on actions to ensure that people are adequately and permanently housed.

Hamilton-Wentworth is in crisis. Homelessness, one of the saddest indicators of an unhealthy community, has risen dramatically over the past couple of years. Emergency shelter usage has jumped 35% in Hamilton from November of 1998 to March of 2000. Foodbanks and meal programs scramble to provide essentials to an ever-growing population of hungry men, women, and particularly children. Transitional housing units have been lost and those remaining have long waiting lists, the not-for-profit housing waiting list has over 4000 households waiting for rent-geared-to-income housing and our vacancy rates are decreasing while the cost of rent is increasing. Legal clinics and agencies offering housing assistance attempt to assist growing numbers of families who have lost their housing or their means of retaining housing, immigrants and refugees struggle to overcome cultural barriers to accessing affordable housing, and other supportive services look for ways to meet ever increasing demand with dwindling resources.

There is also a policy crisis stemming from the absence of new social housing to meet demand, the downloading of responsibility for that housing, and from the debilitating cuts to social assistance that occurred in 1995. Most importantly, it should be stressed, there is a very human crisis being experienced by many members of our community 24 hours of every day that they struggle to get by without safe, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing.

That being said, the community in Hamilton has risen to the task of addressing homelessness by creating a Community Action Plan. Based on the research in the "Our Homes and Our Streets" Report, and driven forward by the federal government's announcement of the Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) fund, the

following document provides a broad-based community framework for solving homelessness in our community. This willingness to work together on such an important social problem speaks volumes about the strength and capacity of our community to address and resolve issues.

The result of the consultation process was an agreed upon 7 main priority areas, which need to be addressed to begin the process of solving homelessness. Priority areas are not listed by order of importance, but rather follow the paths from homelessness to adequate permanent housing. The priority areas concern:

- the over-extension and under-funding of the emergency shelter system;
- the need to coordinate and extend outreach/crisis services;
- the debilitating effects of the cuts to social assistance that occurred in 1995, and the need to have the shelter portion of social assistance reflect actual vacant market rents in the Community;
- the need for persons who are institutionalized for short periods of time to be able to retain the shelter portion of their social assistance;
- the need to protect and develop safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing stock and to educate tenants;
- the need to ensure local food security;
- and the funding of the Homelessness Project Coordinator position for the 3 years of the Plan.

In addition, the remaining recommendations also need to be implemented before the blight of homelessness can be contained and eradicated for the citizens of this community.

With regard to the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI), Human Resources Development Canada has named Social and Public Health Services as the body that will administer the Fund in our community. HRDC has also begun the process of selecting members for the Community Advisory Board. The Community Advisory Board will accept and review proposals for SCPI funding to determine how well they address the priorities and recommendations in the Community Action Plan on the basis of inclusiveness, fairness, and transparency, and will make recommendations for federal funding to the Administrator. Since time constraints are critical in dealing with the crisis in our community, both HRDC and the Administrator have asked that the Plan identify and recommend a number of urgent initiatives that can be implemented in the interim until the Community Advisory Board is formed.

For the purposes of accessing SCPI funding, the following priorities and actions are briefly detailed. In addition, any proposals that address non-priority recommendations in the Plan should be considered if the related 'Action' on that recommendation is identified as commencing in year 1 of the Plan. For a comprehensive understanding of the issues, please read "The Plan" section of this report.

SCPI PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS:

(again, order does not reflect ranking by importance)

Priority Area	Year 1 Action	Year 2 Action	Year 3 Action
Shelters are over-extended and under-funded	• Immediately increase staffing ratios in shelters to meet demand. • Take inventory of physical plants for needed repair and renovation, and complete a needs-assessment of the shelter system that identifies systemic barriers and unmet needs among the populations being served, determines if new shelters are needed and for what populations, and recommends needed expansions or modifications to staffing and physical capacity. • Access SCPI, RRAP, and Shelter Enhancement fund to make needed modifications, repairs, and expansion to the shelters in anticipation of needs-assessment and inventory. • A planning process to determine the range of needs facing seniors and potential solutions should begin in conjunction with the District Health Council. • Begin staff training on the complex needs of clients, including cultural sensitivity training. • Develop transitional housing units to move people out of shelters and into housing or supported housing. • Planning should begin for the establishment of a settlement house. • Planning should begin to determine the feasibility of establishing a self-help group run entirely by those having direct personal experience with homelessness. • Increase funding for housing assistance services to meet demand. • Hamilton Executive Directors' Aboriginal Coalition should work with Shelter providers to collect statistics on aboriginal usage. • Please refer to pages 20 – 25 for a comprehensive discussion of this priority	• Develop supportive transitional housing units to move people out of shelters. • Develop a settlement house for immigrants and refugees new to Hamilton. • If required by needs assessment, develop new shelter services. • Continue all needed maintenance, modification, and expansions to existing shelters. • Continue (and expand or modify as needed) staff training initiatives. • Implement a self-help group made up of individuals who have personal experience with homelessness.	• Fund transitional housing units. • Continue implementing recommendations of the needs assessment. • Continue all needed maintenance, modification, and expansions to existing shelters. • Continue (and expand or modify as needed) staff training initiatives. • Continue implementing Working Group made up of individuals who have personal experience with homelessness.
Develop coordinated 24 hour outreach and crisis support	• Coordination of existing outreach services. • 24 hour outreach and peer support system should be established. • Outreach Working Group should meet to make recommendations and those recommendations should be read into the Plan. • Please refer to pages 27 – 28 for a comprehensive discussion of this priority.	• Continued coordination of outreach services. • Recommendations of the Outreach Working Group should continue to be implemented.	• Recommendations of the Outreach Working Group should continue to be implemented.

Create food security	• Increasing funding to front-line food agencies to meet present demand. • A resource person should be hired to research and produce a report highlighting current services available, current needs being met, and gaps within existing services. • Research creative ways to sustain food security • Bring food agencies and the broader community together to work on a public awareness campaign on hunger related issues. • Please refer to pages 49 – 52 for a comprehensive discussion of this priority	• Implement a public awareness campaign on hunger related issues. • Implement creative ways to sustain food security. • Continue to provide adequate funding to ensure local food security, including the addressing of issues that are raised by the report.	• Continue to implement a public awareness campaign on Hunger related issues. • Continue to implement creative ways to sustain food security. • Continue to provide adequate funding to ensure local food security, including the addressing of issues that are raised by the report.
Housing	• Research on innovative models for utilizing the existing available not-for-profit housing stock and the development of additional safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing. • Adequate inspections of all rooming houses should occur. • Support should be made available to tenant groups to educate tenants. • Please refer to pages 34 & 35 for a comprehensive discussion of this priority	• Implement innovative models for utilizing and expanding not-for-profit housing and the development of additional safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing. • Inspections of rooming houses should continue. • Support should continue for tenant groups.	• Continue to Implement innovative models for utilizing and expanding not-for-profit housing. • Inspections of rooming houses should continue. • Support should continue for tenant advocacy groups. • Education programs for tenants should continue.
Fund Homelessness Project Coordinator position	• Fund Homelessness Project Coordinator position, and other positions as necessary, to coordinate and carry out the Community Action Plan • Fund evaluation position to begin the evaluation of the SCPI funding • Please refer to pages 57 & 58 for a comprehensive discussion of this priority	• Fund Homelessness Project Coordinator position, and other positions as necessary, to coordinate and carry out the Community Action Plan • Fund evaluation position to begin the evaluation of the SCPI funding	• Fund Homelessness Project Coordinator position, and other positions as necessary, to coordinate and carry out the Community Action Plan • Fund evaluation position to begin the evaluation of the SCPI funding

Other priorities and recommendations may also fit the criteria for SCPI resources, but are detailed in the body of the report. As well, there are other funding sources and numerous other resources within the community that can be engaged to address recommendations and actions not covered under SCPI Terms and Conditions. As was said previously, this is not a 3 year Action Plan for SCPI funding; it is an evolving and ongoing community plan to address the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness in the Hamilton-Wentworth community.

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GLOSSARY

Absolute homelessness
'Absolute homelessness' refers to an individual or family who are either living on the streets (including those who are living in tents, vacant buildings or in a car), staying in an emergency shelter or hostel, or staying temporarily with friends or family.

De-institutionalization
'De-institutionalization' occurs when an individual is discharged from an institution, such as a psychiatric hospital or detention facility, into the community. In recent years, there has been a systemic move toward re-integrating individuals into the community who were formerly housed permanently in institutions.

Food-bank
A 'food-bank' provides food hampers with 3 - 4 days of food to individuals and families in the community so that their 'food security' needs are met. Most food-banks can only be accessed once per month, and are staffed by volunteers, and stocked through donations.

Food security
'Food security' refers to the ability of individuals and families to access adequate amounts of nutritionally balanced food. If these needs are not met in a community, then it may be said that the community's 'food security' needs are not met. Food security is a strong determinant of health.

Housing
When 'housing' is referred to in this Plan as a goal it should be understood that it refers to safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, permanent housing.

Meal program
A 'meal program' provides prepared meals to individuals and families. These are sometimes referred to as 'soup kitchens', and are usually staffed by volunteers, who prepare meals from donated food.

Outreach programs
An outreach program actually connects directly with the community by going out into the community to meet people where they are, and to assist in connecting people with a variety of supportive services.

Poverty rate
For the purposes of this plan the 'poverty rate' is calculated as a percentage according to the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Off .

Relative homelessness
An individual or family is experiencing 'Relative homelessness' when they do not have safe, secure, adequate, accessible, permanent housing, or when they are spending greater than 50% of their income on housing.

Rent-geared-to-income housing
This is housing where rent is calculated as a percentage of the tenant's income.

Social, public, or not-for-profit housing
All of these terms refers to not-for-profit housing. Some of this housing is offered as 'rent-geared-to-income' housing.

Supportive Housing
This phrase refers to housing, usually permanent, in which tenants who require supportive services in order to maintain their housing and live in the community are afforded those supports.

Supportive Services
'Supportive services' are those services that assist individuals in moving from a state of homelessness toward being housed, or help to prevent homelessness. They range from legal assistance to prevent an eviction, to food-banks providing individuals and families with needed food, to in-house programs that allow people to maintain their housing.

Transitional Housing
A form of shelter where clients are allowed to stay for a longer period of time (usually up to one year) so that supportive services and programming can be made available in order to help that person obtain and keep permanent housing.

1.0 THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

This is a community action plan to address homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth. It is the direct result of a broad community consultation process and is based on the information contained in the "Our Homes Our Streets: Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth" report. It is an evolving project that will be supplemented by a number of community initiatives and specifically by an annual revisiting of the substance of the Plan by the Homelessness Steering Committee and the annual update of "Our Homes and Our Streets" or the "Homelessness Information Sheet". That being said, the thrust of this document is 'action'. Homelessness is a major crisis in Hamilton-Wentworth, and it is only through concerted and inclusively coordinated action that we can begin to come to terms with this human tragedy.

Thankfully, in our community, there are already a number of organizations, and its parent committees, working cooperatively to stem this crisis in our community. It is also worth remarking that there are a number of dedicated agencies who have devoted their efforts to alleviating homelessness in our community long before the issue ever registered on political agendas in this country. Without the work of these dedicated professionals the homelessness situation would be much bleaker. It is only through a continued cooperative approach to the crisis in our community, that we can hope to provide both relief and realistic options to the members of our community who are experiencing the crisis firsthand. Recently, our community has implemented an innovative permanent supportive housing project for people with a serious mental illness, continues to improve shelter and supportive services for youth who are experiencing homelessness, started a community - based housing emergency loan program, implemented an eviction prevention project, and among other cooperative endeavors has in fact produced this Plan. These multi-agency initiatives are the obvious markers of a community that recognizes the value of cooperation, but much of the cooperation in our community occurs on a level that gets little notice from the average community member. It is the cooperation that occurs on the front lines of this crisis, between front-line workers and between persons experiencing homelessness that provides the hints as to how this Action Plan can be implemented. This Plan is evidence of the integrated way the community works together and it is an attempt at inclusion. Over the 3 years of this Plan, the very hard work required for 'inclusion' will continue as the Plan is implemented, and community consultation and cooperation continues.

It cannot be overstated that the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth is in crisis. Although there are a great many individuals and agencies who are working very hard to find solutions, the numbers of persons who live without safe, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing in our community is rising.

And it is in light of this urgent need that the community has come together to develop an Action Plan on homelessness.

In our community, and in the larger Canadian community, we are seeing increasing numbers of people who are living in poverty and because of this fact, we are also witnessing a staggering number of individuals and families accessing emergency services such as shelters or food-banks.

There is a crisis among service providers in the Region. As our shelters operate at or near capacity, food-banks and meal programs scramble to provide essentials to an ever-growing population of hungry men, women, and particularly children; legal clinics and agencies offering housing assistance attempt to help growing numbers of families who have lost their housing or their means of retaining housing; immigrants and refugees struggle to overcome cultural barriers to accessing affordable housing; and, other supportive services look for ways to meet ever increasing demand with dwindling resources. There is also a policy crisis stemming from the absence of new social housing to meet demand, the downloading of responsibility for that housing, and from the debilitating cuts to social assistance that occurred in 1995. Most importantly, it should be stressed, there is a very human crisis being experienced by many members of our community 24 hours of every day that they struggle to get by without safe, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing.

Although it is difficult to measure the number of deaths that occur in our community due to homelessness, there is strong evidence that homelessness can lead to death, and that it is a contributing factor to some death in our community. The effects of the elements on those who are on the streets, the increased risks of violence, the cumulative effects of a poor or insufficient diet, and a lack of health care resources aimed at helping those who are experiencing homelessness, are some of the many ways in which homelessness can contribute or lead to death. In fact, Mary's Place, an emergency shelter for women who have mental health issues run by the Good Shepherd, is named in memory of Mary Popovic, a woman whose death in 1993 led many advocates in the community to press for greater supports for those experiencing homelessness. It should be kept in mind that many of the crisis discussed in this Plan are intimately linked with the well-being of the community at large.

The seriousness of the crisis facing our community cannot be understood simply by reading this document. The full scope of the problem can only be glimpsed through a combination of reading the research that has been and will be produced by agencies in the community (such as the "Our Homes and Our Streets" report that was produced by the Homelessness Steering Committee, and the updated 'Homelessness Information Sheet'), and by taking the time to visit one or more of the many front line services in the community where the

human tragedies that inform the statistics occur every day. Even when one has taken the time to become informed of this crisis, it is vitally important to acknowledge that the truly informed view will only come from those individuals who are suffering the crisis: those who work on the front lines; and most importantly, those who are experiencing homelessness firsthand.

Homelessness is not an issue that can be studied in isolation, as the reasons that people experience homelessness are complex and inter-related. There are many social factors that influence homelessness in our community. They range from the problems facing recent immigrants or refugees, to the problems facing those who are dealing with mental health issues or who are living with a disability, to the debilitating nature of addictions, to the immediate and long-term effects of domestic violence or abuse. But the root causes of homelessness lie in a combination of the availability and affordability of housing and inadequate income.

In Toronto, the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, in their report "Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto", identified four main causes of homelessness: increased poverty, lack of affordable housing, deinstitutionalization and lack of discharge planning, and social factors.

Of all the issues that impact on a person's likelihood of becoming homeless, poverty is the most prevalent and relentless. People who are homeless are generally very poor and poverty in our community is on the rise. In Hamilton-Wentworth, our poverty rate increased from 17.4% in 1991 to 21.9% in 1996. This means that approximately 100,000 people in Hamilton-Wentworth are poor.

Like recent trends in demographics on homelessness, the face of poverty is diverse, and reflects systemic barriers to education, employment, fair wages and social assistance, and full and meaningful participation in community life. It is especially harsh for women and children, newcomers to Canada, visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples and youth. In 1996 in Hamilton-Wentworth, women were more likely to be poor than men (25% compared to 20%), especially women who head lone-parent families. Lone-parent families are at much higher risk of poverty than families headed by two parents, since 64% of all lone-parent families fall below the poverty line, and 85% (13,745) of all lone-parent families in Hamilton-Wentworth are headed by women.

Newcomers to Canada, as well as visible minorities, also have high rates of poverty in Hamilton-Wentworth. In 1996, 50% of all recent immigrants were poor, as were 41% of visible minorities. A large percentage of Aboriginal people in our community also experience poverty (48%), as do 35% of people with disabilities.

While inadequate social assistance rates account for a great deal of the poverty in our community (in 1997, over 60,000 people relied on General Welfare or Family Benefits assistance), the changing economic landscape has also left people who are working financially vulnerable.

Earnings for young people between 15 and 24 years of age have decreased dramatically over the past 10 years, indeed in the five years between 1990-95, income for people in this age category fell by 11.3%.

In a recent study by the Canadian Council on Social Development, it appears that families have also been left poor by the current marketplace due to low wages, unemployment and periods of time spent outside the labour force. This study also found that there was a 6% increase in the severity of market poverty in Canada over the last decade. (Schellenbege, Grant & Ross, David (1997). *Left Poor by the Market: A Look at Family Poverty and Earnings.* Ottawa: Centre for International Statistics at the Canadian Council on Social Development.)

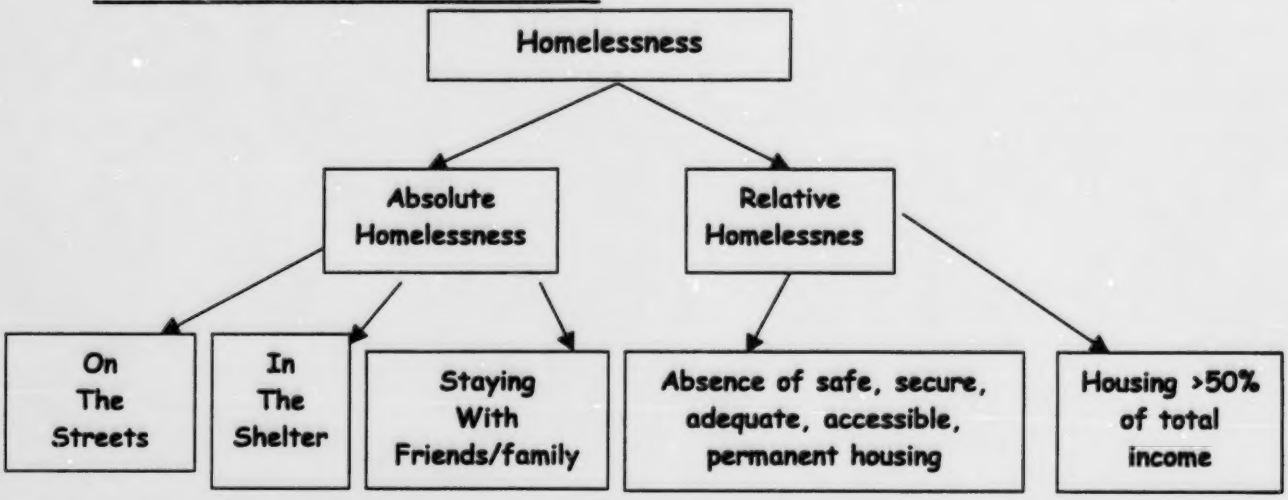
It is not coincidental that the three cities in Ontario to receive the new federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative funding for homelessness rank at the bottom of nine cities over 500,000 across Canada in terms of poverty rates. (Lee, Kevin (2000). *Urban Poverty in Canada: A statistical Profile.* Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

While affordable housing is definitely an important piece to solving the homelessness puzzle, for people living in deep poverty, the barrier to finding affordable housing has less to do with the cost of rental accommodation than it has to do with level of income. At some point, it does not matter how affordable housing is, if your income is too low, it will still be unaffordable. One exception is for people living in rent-geared-to-income housing, because their shelter costs are determined according to their income. Of course, people living in this housing are still poor. And rent-geared-to-income housing is still unaffordable for some due to extreme poverty, inaccessible to others because of past arrears or evictions, and the lengthy waiting lists mean that it is not a viable option for many in the community. Until the root causes of poverty are addressed, homelessness will not be resolved in Hamilton-Wentworth, or in any other community across Canada.

2.0 THE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

There are a number of ways to define homelessness. For the purpose of this Action Plan, "homelessness" can mean one or both of two situations. The term will sometimes refer to the state of absolute homelessness in which an individual or family has no housing at all, or is staying in a temporary form of shelter (this would include "hidden homelessness" in which the individual or family is staying with friends or relatives as an alternative, or who are living in vacant buildings or outdoor spaces), and it will sometimes refer to relative homelessness in which a person does not have housing that is safe, secure, adequate, accessible, and permanent, or is currently living in housing that costs more than 50% of total income. It is the intention of this report to use the most inclusive of measures unless otherwise indicated.

Chart 1: Definition of Homelessness



Individuals and families also experience homelessness in different ways throughout their life. While some experience homelessness as a temporary crisis in their life, for all too many others homelessness is a recurring or insurmountable tragedy. These different types of homelessness are often defined as:

- Situationally homeless - state of being without a home is temporary and can be resolved as a specific situation in their life is dealt with.
- Periodically homeless - people who live fairly disadvantaged lives which leaves them at constant risk of becoming homeless
- Chronically homeless - people who spend a great deal of there lives on the streets and have many issues that impede their ability to find and maintain housing and reconnect with their communities.

Unfortunately, as the crisis in our community worsens, qualitative evidence seems to indicate that those who may have been situationally homeless in the past, may now experience periodical or chronic homelessness due to shrinking stocks of affordable housing, and increasing poverty. This is a trend that must be reversed.

It is obvious from the above that the broad definition of homelessness in our community will represent a significant sector of the total population, but the true extent of the problem remains startling. The October, 1999 report "Our Homes and Our Streets" found that 23% of all tenant households are paying 50% or more of their total income on rent (47% are paying more than 30% of total income on rent).

In addition, statistics collected by the Housing Help Centre representing an analysis of 563 Coordinated Housing Access Network (CHAN) applications completed by clients of that agency between January 1, 2000 and June 30, 2000, give some indication of the problem. 32%, of applications were from individuals who were experiencing absolute homelessness as defined in this Plan.

Of those people, 55% were living temporarily with a friend or family, 29% were staying in a shelter or hostel, 3% were on the streets, 3% were staying in a motel, 3% were attempting to leave an institution, and 7% were in an unknown situation. It should be noted that qualitative evidence overwhelmingly indicates that persons who seek temporary accommodations with friends or family often move frequently as they exhaust their options for temporary accommodation. Indeed evidence indicates that many stay only a few days in one place before moving on. Contrary to the popular stereotype belief that homelessness is primarily experienced by men, the statistics also indicate that of the applications made by people that were experiencing homelessness, 37% were male-lead households, while 45% were female-lead households (18% were two or more adult-lead households). Similarly, debunking the stereotype that homelessness is primarily experienced by single persons with no children, 38% of the 'homeless' applications were from persons who had children.

Staggering increases in foodbank and meal program usage also indicate that increasing numbers of families are facing the heart-wrenching dilemma of whether to 'pay the rent or feed the kids'. (This is no small problem when one takes into account that Campaign 2000 reports in their "Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario: 1999" that one child in five in Ontario now lives in poverty.)

One need look no further than the number of emergency shelters that operated at or above capacity last year, to get some indication of the scope of the crisis facing our community since those numbers represent but the barest minimum of individuals and families who are experiencing absolute homelessness.

As an historical note, it should be stated that it has not always been this way. If one accepts that the numbers of emergency food services is indicative of poverty in our communities, and that poverty is directly related to homelessness, then it should be noted that it was not until 1981 that the first post World War II foodbank in Canada appeared in Edmonton (although some groups, mainly churches, had been provided small quantities of emergency food during the interim). By 1992, the number of foodbanks in Canada outnumbered McDonald's franchises by three to one (from, "Halton Food Bank Study: Alternatives to Dependency" by the Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre, February, 1999). By the Fall of 1998 the Canadian Association of Food Banks' "Hunger Count" reported that some 716,500 men, women, and children received food hampers in March of that year, and children accounted for around 41.5% of those assisted. While in this time of crisis it is crucial that emergency food services are able to meet this increasing demand, the history of these now large institutions indicates that food security for all is an achievable goal; indeed, it is a not-distant memory for many. The long-term goal of this Action Plan is the elimination of homelessness in our community, including the positive effects that situation will have on food security in the Region.

Qualitative evidence also indicates that like any sector of our community, the differences in the ways in which persons experience homelessness creates hierarchies in that community. A person who is situationally homeless, or a person who does not access the shelter system, may occupy a different place in the social ladder of that community than a person or family for whom the crisis has been more long-lasting or accepted. With this in mind, it should also be noted that there appears to be a strong sense of community among those who experience homelessness. This sense of community particularly comes to the fore at times when a member of the community goes missing. It is not uncommon for concerted efforts to be made by the homeless community to find such individuals and to aid them in any way possible. As in any community that lives in constant crisis, a bond is formed between members that transcends their own individual situations. For this Action Plan to be successful it will be necessary for the larger community to recognize the communitarian efforts of those who experience homelessness, and to learn from them. Front-line service providers in the community have long recognized this, but it will be necessary to educate the larger community about this disadvantaged and marginalized, yet persevering sector of our community.

3.0 HISTORY OF THE PROCESS

3.1 How did we get here?

In response to increasing public awareness of the problem of homelessness in communities across Ontario, the provincial government struck a Task Force on Homelessness in 1998. The Task Force visited Hamilton in March of that year to hear from regional government officials, service providers and citizens about their issues and experiences with homelessness in our community.

With the release of the Task Force on Homelessness report and "Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto" (also known as the Golden Report), a number of housing advocates recognized the need for a broad report on the state of housing and homelessness in the Hamilton-Wentworth community. This included looking beyond the numbers of people using shelters and food banks, to other indicators of risk such as, vacancy rates, new housing, evictions, poverty, waiting lists for social housing and affordable housing stock. We hoped that such a report would provide us with the information to better understand what is happening in our community, so that we can then inform others, including the government about homelessness in our Region.

In the Fall of 1998 a joint *Ad Hoc* Homelessness Steering Committee, was struck. The Committee was born out of a partnership between the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter, and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee (formerly Social Housing and Access Committee); the Homelessness Steering Committee reports back to, and is accountable to, both of these committees. Over the next year this committee, in partnership with the Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, initiated and oversaw a body of research that led to: the presentation of preliminary findings to the Regional Public Health & Community Services Committee; the release of a report entitled "Our Homes and Our Streets: Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth", and in October of 1999 a community forum was held in order to present it to the community. The forum also provided the 67 participants with an opportunity to discuss the report and any new trends or information that had been missed during its writing. An executive summary of this report is included as Appendix A. The report was widely distributed in the community, and was sent on to all levels of government.

In January of 2000, based on the "Our Homes and Our Streets" Report, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) approached the Social Planning & Research Council to request that a Community Action Plan on Homelessness be developed for the Region.

Although the original completion date requested by HRDC was March 31, 2000, it soon became obvious that a longer timeline was necessary if the plan was to be inclusive and comprehensive.

Accordingly, two community forums were held on February 25, 2000 and April 11, 2000, at which a wide range of voices were heard. These forums were organized by the Homelessness Steering Committee, built upon the research, and recommendations contained in the report "Our Homes and Our Streets." In addition to the 42 original recommendations outlined in that report, 10 new recommendations and 9 combined/modified recommendations were developed during this process, to bring the total number of recommendations to 44.

The first Community Forum, on February 25, was organized as a workshop to develop the beginning of a community action plan. At that workshop 79 participants, representing a large number of community organizations providing a wide range of community services, all three levels of government and a number of interested individuals met to discuss priorities. Indeed, a number of private sector organizations, such as the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association, the Hamilton and District Apartment Association, and the Hamilton-Wentworth Residential Care Association, had representatives in attendance in order to broaden the scope of the community sectors involved in developing a community plan.

As a result of that workshop:

- 24 higher priority recommendations were chosen;
- additional new recommendations were developed;
- discussions were begun on what criteria could be used in finalizing priorities

Although the workshop participants were able to choose 24 high priority areas, they made it clear that they did not want to see the remaining recommendations lost in the process to narrow priorities for the Community Action Plan.

On April 11, 2000 a further workshop was held with 58 persons in attendance. At this workshop, decisions were made by those in attendance regarding the highest priority recommendations. The message was again conveyed that while priorities were necessary, it was crucial to ensure that the complete package of recommendations were supported and moved forward for implementation. Four different recommendations received majority support from participants using the "dotmocracy" process, (where each participant was given 3 "dots" of votes) while a number of others seemed to cluster together around housing issues.

Opinions were expressed at the workshops, as well as in interviews undertaken as part of this report, that changes are needed to improve existing services for those who are experiencing homelessness, particularly for clients of shelters many of whom are repeat users. Many community representatives also forcefully advocated expansion of services to ensure that low-income persons who are currently housed are provided with support and education to ensure that they do not lose their current housing.

In mid-May an initial draft of an Action Plan was circulated to the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC). Feedback from both committees indicated a need for further consultation and research to support the recommendations chosen in the two workshops.

In mid-June, a Homelessness Project Coordinator was hired. Through consultation with Human Resources Development Canada, the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter, and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee, it was decided that an amended timeline would aim to have a final Community Action Plan in place by the Fall of 2000. Four *ad hoc* working groups had been formed to expand on each of the four priorities chosen in the April 11 workshop. With this in mind, it was decided that a further interim draft of the Plan would be made available to members of the above committees at the end of July. This would allow the Homelessness Project Coordinator to receive additional input on the form and substance of the Plan.

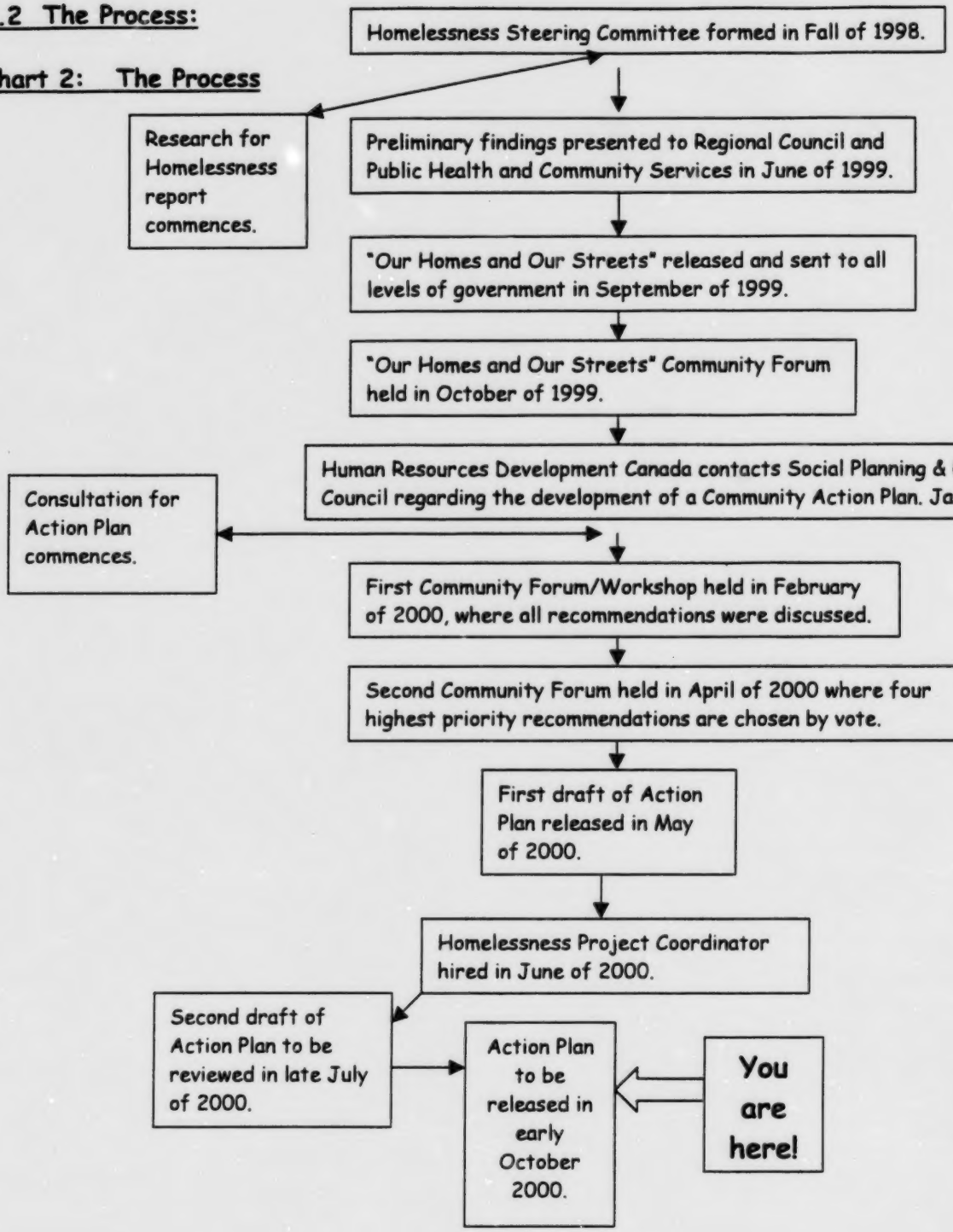
Through consultation with the working groups, the Homelessness Steering Committee, service providers, and consumers, it was decided that an additional three priorities should be added to the four priorities that were identified at the Community Forums.

The final report of the Community Action Plan was distributed to members of the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter, the Solutions for Housing Action Committee and the Homelessness Steering Committee for final comment and endorsement in September 2000. Once completed, the Plan will be presented back to the community at the Second Annual Homelessness Forum on October 5th.

A complete list of the organizations and individuals that were consulted during this process is included in Appendix D.

3.2 The Process:

Chart 2: The Process


Homelessness Steering Committee formed in Fall of 1998.
Research for Homelessness report commences.
Preliminary findings presented to Regional Council and Public Health and Community Services in June of 1999.
"Our Homes and Our Streets" released and sent to all levels of government in September of 1999.
"Our Homes and Our Streets" Community Forum held in October of 1999.
Human Resources Development Canada contacts Social Planning & Research Council regarding the development of a Community Action Plan. Jan. 2000
Consultation for Action Plan commences.
First Community Forum/Workshop held in February of 2000, where all recommendations were discussed.
Second Community Forum held in April of 2000 where four highest priority recommendations are chosen by vote.
First draft of Action Plan released in May of 2000.
Homelessness Project Coordinator hired in June of 2000.
Second draft of Action Plan to be reviewed in late July of 2000.
Action Plan to be released in early October 2000.
You are here!

4.0 THE PLAN

4.1 Objectives

1. **To alleviate the hardship of those who experience absolute homelessness. To achieve this objective the community shall:**
   - secure funding for urgent repairs, expansion, and modifications to all emergency shelters, supported and transitional housing ;
   - complete a needs-assessment of the shelter system that identifies populations of people not currently being served and the best way to meet their needs;
   - secure funding for a 'settlement house' in the community that will meet the needs of the diverse communities of immigrants and refugees who are part of our community;
   - enhance existing supports for locating and maintaining housing;
   - ensure that food-banks and meal programs in the community are able to make available nutritious and culturally sensitive foods in adequate quantities and on an ongoing basis.

2. **To promote a 'continuum of supports' approach to eliminating homelessness. To achieve this objective the community shall:**
   - extend outreach crisis programs to 24 hour service;
   - continue to coordinate and expand outreach services internally and externally so as to ensure that the entire community that is experiencing homelessness can be connected with all relevant services;
   - ensure the current shelter system can meet the needs of all people requiring overnight service;
   - provide supportive counseling services in the shelter system to ensure that people have the supports they need to find and maintain housing;
   - develop more 'transitional' forms of shelter, similar to the ones offered to women who are victims of domestic violence, so that individuals receive the time and the supports they need to address personal issues and to obtain housing;
   - continue to explore and develop models of permanent supportive housing;
   - work to ensure that public housing units are not sold off;
   - attempt to secure additional public housing for the community;
   - work to ensure that adequate inspections of for-profit housing are carried out, and that tenants are informed of their rights through educational programs.

3. **In order to strengthen the capacity of our community to address the needs of individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, a number of working groups and committees will continue to monitor and effect the implementation of the priorities of this plan. Those working groups include:**
    - The Homelessness Steering Committee will implement, monitor, and evaluate the Community Action Plan over the 3 year period.
    - The Homelessness Initiative Campaign For Adequate Welfare (HICFAW) will advocate for the reinstatement of the 21.6% cuts that occurred to social assistance rates in 1995 (also indexed for inflation), and to have the shelter portion of social assistance rates reflect the true market value of vacancies in the region.
    - The Shelter Working Group will continue to meet so that a needs-assessment of the current shelter system can be effected, and so that a comprehensive housing and supports inventory can be developed.
    - The Outreach Working Group will continue to meet so that outreach needs can be assessed and services can be coordinated and expanded to remove any gaps.
    - The Homelessness Steering Committee (along with other interested parties) will approach government, relevant community organizations, and organizations across the province to advocate for changes to social assistance benefits so that those who are hospitalized or incarcerated for short periods of time are able to keep their housing (some time limits will apply).
    - The Food Focus Group will continue to meet in order to assess the needs of emergency food services in the region so that services can be coordinated and needs met, while also looking for innovative ways to ensure food security in the community.
    - The Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC) will monitor and implement a number of the recommendations in the Community Action Plan.
    - The Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter will monitor trends in the shelter and food security agencies.

4. **The expansion of the current knowledge base, expertise, and data on homelessness issues, and the communication of this knowledge to the broader community.**
    - The "Our Homes and Our Streets" report will be updated annually.
    - An annual community forum on homelessness will be held on Housing Awareness Day. (First Monday in October)
    - The Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition (HEDAC) will work with the emergency shelter providers to ensure that statistics are collected on Aboriginal Persons who are accessing the shelters.

- The Homelessness Steering Committee will continue to assist in the implementation of these recommendations, produce research, and inform the community of the evolution of the Action Plan.

5. **The Community will work to ensure that the needs of all people who traditionally experience barriers in accessing services and housing are being met. These groups include, but are not limited to: people who are poor, people with mental health difficulties, people with physical or developmental disabilities, youth, the elderly, people with HIV/AIDS, immigrants, refugees and newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal persons, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, visible minorities, women, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, people who experience barriers because of their gender identity, people with addictions, and sex trade workers.**

Through the work on all of the recommendations in this Plan the Homelessness Steering Committee and Social and Public Health Services will monitor the coordination and improvement of services in the community. The SCPI funds directed to this plan will be administered, monitored and evaluated by Social and Public Health Services of the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth. A Community Advisory Board, currently in development, will review and recommend proposals for the SCPI funds.

The Homelessness Steering Committee will be responsible for insuring that the complete plan is implemented, above and beyond SCPI funding, for as long as it takes to be completed.

The Committee will also liase with all working groups to ensure strong coordination and communication with the community.

4.2 The Priorities

As mentioned, the community consultation process narrowed the 44 total recommendations to twenty-four priorities in order to facilitate a more focused consultation at the second Community Forum. At the second Community Forum, participants employed three votes each in order to prioritize the remaining recommendations. It was emphasized that any Community Action Plan must not lose sight of all the recommendations flowing from the "Our Homes and Our Streets" Report. The Homelessness Steering Committee, after lengthy discussion, decided that the underlying thrust of the Action Plan should flow from the four highest priorities that arose from the community consultation process, and three additional priorities that arose out of consultation with service providers. While the overall goal of this Action Plan is the elimination of homelessness in our community, these

priorities can be said to represent the major objectives of the Plan. The priorities are (in the order that they appear in the Plan):

- The current shelter system is overextended and under-funded. There is a need for adequate funding of shelters as they are often the frontline for people who are experiencing homelessness. Additional resources are required to ensure more quality, effective staffing. That is to say, if more resources are made available so as to ensure that an adequate number of qualified staff are always on hand to provide all needed services, and that those staff are provided with comprehensive training to help them deal with diverse communities and complex needs, then a more comprehensive service model will result.

  In anticipation of this work, the community should also support all urgent maintenance, modifications, expansion, and staffing requirements at emergency shelters so as to ensure that emergency shelter is available for all individuals and families who require it. In no particular order, the following actions are also recommended.

  A needs-assessment of the shelter system is required, that identifies populations of people not currently being served and the best way to meet their needs and to identify any systemic barriers that may exist in the current shelter provision model

  The community also supports the planning and construction of a settlement house for Hamilton-Wentworth. It is hoped that such a facility will begin to address the shelter needs of the large immigrant, refugee, and newcomer communities, as well as providing an environment in which those individuals and families can connect with all relevant supportive services to assist them on the road to housing.

- **Current outreach programs have been very effective at meeting the needs of people who are homeless and/or have mental health issues and/or are vulnerable to losing their housing. However, they are overwhelmed and are unable to meet the needs of many people without having a comprehensive 24-hour program of support, and an expanded and more coordinated structure. We recommend that the Community, the Region, and the Province work to expand our local outreach team to effectively meet the needs of people who have a mental health and/or addiction issues, have developmental or physical challenges and/or are struggling with issues of homelessness.**

- **Affordable, adequate and safe housing is a key component to solving the homelessness crisis; including the preservation and development of both existing social housing stock and safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, permanent rental housing stock.**

  We recommend that SHAC work to ensure that the 700 scattered public housing units are not sold-off and that the provincial and federal governments renew their commitment to developing non-profit housing for people with low incomes. We also recommend that successful creative models of housing, as well as innovative ways to utilize existing non-profit housing stock, be explored for our community.

  We also strongly recommend that the Provincial and Federal governments renew their commitment to developing non-profit housing for families with low incomes, Aboriginal persons, youth, seniors, women, and singles in need of permanent affordable housing.

- **Poverty remains one of the single most important factors leading to homelessness. Current social assistance levels result in people being extremely vulnerable to losing their housing or being unable to secure adequate housing. We recommend a reinstatement of the 21.6 % that was cut from social assistance rates in 1995. Additionally, that percentage should also reflect inflation rates since 1995. Thus social assistance rates should be reinstated by 27.5%**

  We also recommend the creation of a formula which would base the shelter portion of social assistance rates on the average rent of a vacant rental market unit (appropriate to family size) in the Region.

  Further, although ODSP recipients did not experience the 21.6% cutback in assistance, they have not received increases since 1995 and so should receive a 5.9% increase for inflation as well as a re-instatement of the many discretionary benefits that have been removed from ODSP.

- **Social assistance procedures should be changed to allow a resident who is temporarily hospitalized, or incarcerated, to continue to pay their rent and hold their apartment until discharge (some limits will apply).**

- It is often through the services provided by foodbanks and meal programs that people living on inadequate incomes are able to maintain their housing. Therefore, all levels of government should commit to ensuring local food security and the community should explore creative ways to address the root causes of hunger, since those programs are not a sustainable or adequate solution to the problem of hunger in our community.

- It takes time and resources to coordinate a community's efforts to address homelessness. Without dedicated staff resources and an adequate budget, this work could not take place.

  Resources should be made available from all levels of government to fund the Homelessness Project Coordinator position, and to ensure that adequate staffing is made available to provide support to existing community based organizations and governments to help implement these recommendations.

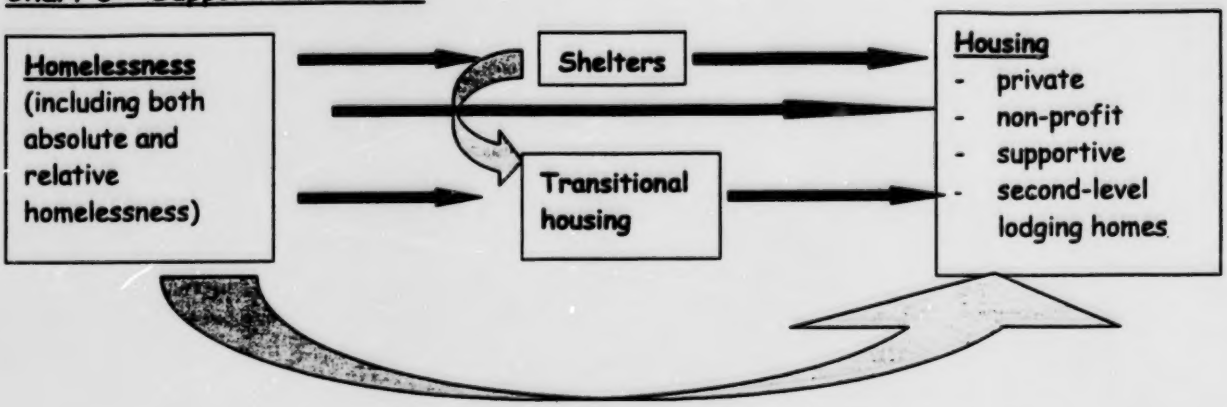
4.3 The Paths to Housing

It should be recognized that the ways in which persons and families who are homeless achieve stable housing are varied and complex (whether those persons are experiencing absolute or relative homelessness, and whether their experience over time has been one of situational, periodical or chronic homelessness).

In order to address the needs of this diverse segment of our community, many of whom experience systemic barriers to accessing housing and related services, it is necessary to coordinate services. This will ensure that the individual being served can proceed to safe and affordable housing in the shortest period of time and in a respectable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive manner that coordinates services with the individual's own resources. Similarly, it is important that outreach, supportive, and shelter/transitional services are available to assist those persons who require such services. At this time of crisis in our community it is vital that emergency services are able to provide assistance to individuals who are experiencing absolute homelessness.

A simplified model of the paths to housing in our community takes into account the complex ways in which individuals experience homelessness, as well as the laudable efforts of service providers to move toward more transitional and coordinated forms of assistance.

Chart 3: Supportive Services



Supportive Services **	
• Food banks	• Links Voice Mail Project
• Food Share distribution	• Trusteeships
• Meal Programs	• SISO
• Outreach	• The Aboriginal Health Centre
• Housing Help Centre	• Hamilton Urban Core Clinic
• Legal Clinics	• The Native Friendship Centre
• Drop-In Centres	• Etc.

** It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list of supportive services in our community. It is a sampling.

What the above diagram attempts to show is the necessary complexity of our current strategy to combat homelessness in our community, and also to illustrate the scope of services that are needed to deal with this crisis. The person who is experiencing homelessness may not access all of the above services, or some individuals may indeed require services not yet offered. It is important to acknowledge that the complexity of this issue is a product of the diversity of those persons who experience homelessness, and the ways in which they experience it.

For instance, those individuals whom we might refer to as the 'hidden' homeless may not access shelters, as they already have temporary accommodation with friends or family. Also, women who are experiencing abuse may not choose to leave their abuser for a number of reasons ranging from fear to poverty to cultural beliefs or pressures. However, many individuals who are experiencing 'absolute' homelessness on the streets do access the shelter system, and accordingly, our community offers a number of supportive services through the shelter system to help those individuals or families on the road to stable housing.

Thus it is imperative that shelter providers in the community continue to move toward more transitional forms of shelter where individuals and families are offered a longer stay coupled with the supports and assistance needed to obtain housing.

The Community should also continue to move toward more comprehensive forms of outreach, so that those who do access the shelter system are provided with the assistance they need to attain safe and stable housing. Again, the community has begun to coordinate its services so that those who end up on the streets or in the shelters can connect with services that will assist them in obtaining appropriate housing, and it is important that this coordination is expanded so that the services available to all individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness are maximized. It is hoped, that through a coordinated effort that employs both services and advocacy, our community can ensure both that supportive services and emergency shelter are available to all who need them, and that safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, permanent housing is available at the end of the process. Additionally, it should be noted, the community has begun to develop and implement innovative models of permanent supportive housing for those who will always require support to live independently. These efforts should also be strongly supported.

This Plan takes the position that a continuum of supports are necessary to help individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness to move from that situation to safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, permanent housing.

4.4 Leaving the Streets

For referencing purposes only, the recommendations have been numbered. Numbers in no way indicate level of priority.

This section of the Action Plan will discuss recommendations that mostly concern initiatives that will assist individuals and families in their efforts to acquire basic shelter. Unfortunately, in this time of crisis in our community, there are growing numbers of persons who need emergency assistance before they can begin to access the supportive services that would bring them closer to obtaining safe and affordable housing. It is hoped that many of these priorities will help our community to coordinate efforts so that those who access emergency services are shown a path to safe and affordable housing.

1. PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATION: SHELTERS

The current shelter system is overextended and under-funded. There is a need for adequate funding of shelters as they are often the frontline for people who are experiencing homelessness. Resources are required to ensure more quality, effective staffing to meet the growing demand. That is to say, if more resources are made available so as to ensure that an adequate number of qualified staff are always on hand to provide all needed services, and that those staff are provided with comprehensive training to help them deal with diverse communities and complex needs, then a more comprehensive service model will result.

The community should also support all urgent maintenance, modifications, expansion, and staffing requirements at emergency shelters so as to ensure that emergency shelter is available for all individuals and families who require it. In no particular order, the following actions are also recommended.

While the community believes that safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, permanent housing should be available for all in need, the reality is that many residents of Hamilton-Wentworth rely on the emergency shelters. Unfortunately some individuals and families have to rely on shelters for many nights of accommodation. Some individuals, because they cannot access housing, are even forced to begin what many front-line workers and consumers refer to as the 'rounds', where an individual moves from shelter to shelter (or city to city!) staying the maximum time at each facility.

In the research undertaken for the "Our Homes and Our Streets" report, in interviews conducted in preparation for this report, in the discussions which occurred at the two workshops which developed this Community Action Plan, and in the discussions of the

Shelter Working Group, there were a number of major gaps identified in Hamilton - Wentworth's current shelter system:

- lack of adequate funding for both men's and women's shelters (men's shelters are currently funded at $34.50 per day per client compared to the federal rate of $84.00 per day per client; women's shelters' funding is based on 1995 occupancy rates, which have skyrocketed in recent years;
- the lack of funding for, or connection with professional support services for the many clients of shelters with complex needs;
- the deteriorating condition of some of the men's shelters, due in part to high occupancy rates causing some wear and tear on the shelters, as well as the cramped conditions that users of those shelters must often deal with;
- the lack of adequate statistics regarding Aboriginal persons who are accessing the emergency shelters;
- the lack of adequate shelter space for families as families often have more children and are staying longer in the shelter system;
- the difficulties the shelter system has in responding to the needs of families with teenage sons,
- those with adult children with developmental challenges,
- seniors,
- visible minorities, immigrants and refugees;
- the complex needs of seniors who are experiencing homelessness, many of whom are also primary caregivers for children;
- the complex needs of immigrants, refugees, and newcomers, many of whom identify systemic barriers such as lack of translation services or cultural sensitivity (with regard to culturally diverse women who are experiencing abuse see "A Non-Shelter Response to Violence: An Alternative Model" by the Alternative Service Development Advisory Group, 1997);
- a need for emergency shelter spaces that would accommodate the complex needs of families. While the need for emergency hotel accommodation for families has increased from 1998 to 1999, and it appears that there will be a further increase this year based on year-to-date data, 70% of referrals were due to the women's shelters being full, while 30% did not meet the admission criteria. It is hoped that urgent expansions to the women's shelter system coupled with some beds being made available at a new settlement house will address the needs of these families.
- an urgent need for coordinated internal and external outreach workers so that additional programming can be offered, and individuals and families can be connected with the supportive services they need to obtain housing.

1. ACTIONS

To improve the existing shelter system, the Community Action Plan recommends:

1. An inventory should be conducted of all shelters and food centres including an examination of the physical state of the existing shelters. This process should result in a template for housing and supports inventories. The Community Map of Services in this Plan, the Ontario Food System Survey, and the Second Level Lodging Home updated inventory can be used as a basis for this template. The research for the inventory should proceed quickly as some of the needed repairs may be eligible for funding under the federal government's Shelter Enhancement Initiative (for domestic violence shelters). This inventory should proceed in concert with a needs-assessment for the shelter system. The needs assessment should involve all interested parties including those who are experiencing or who have experienced homelessness.

   The research should include a thorough review of the current shelter system including:
   - Physical condition
   - Capacity
   - Staffing on site and outreach
   - Populations being served
   - Unmet needs
   - Staffing requirements and training
   - Systemic barriers

   This inventory and needs-assessment should be used to identify needed services, and groups who are not currently being served, and to establish service projections that can be used to support proposals for government, community and agency support. **(This Action will commence in year 1 of the Plan, and will be revisited throughout the three years of the Plan.)**

2. In anticipation of the completion of the inventory and needs-assessment, funding should be made available for all urgent maintenance, modifications, expansion and staffing needs of the shelters. The Shelter Working Group indicated that many shelters are currently operating over capacity. Funding should be made available to ensure that all individuals and families needing to access the emergency shelters can do so, and that appropriate space is made available for programming and to ensure privacy. **(This Action should commence immediately in year 1 of the Plan.)**

3. A planning process to determine the range of needs facing seniors and potential solutions, should begin. A Committee should be formed that will link with the Hamilton-Wentworth District Health Council's supportive housing planning process for long-term care. This process will also include a review of seniors who are living in Second Level Lodging Homes. **(This Action will proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

4. In anticipation of the completion of the systemic barriers section of the needs-assessment, a project whereby cultural sensitivity and anti-racism training can be offered to all shelter staff should be organized. This project should be organized by SISO, the Homelessness Steering Committee, Shelter Providers, and other interested and affected parties. In addition, similar projects should begin as the needs assessment progresses and other systemic barriers are identified. It is hoped that through a cooperative education model, identified groups' needs will be addressed, while shelter providers will be able to offer relevant training to their staff at low cost. Ultimately, such projects will provide additional avenues of communication between shelter providers and the community at large. **(The Action for the first part of this recommendation will proceed in year 1 of the plan; further projects will follow the needs assessment in year 2 of the Plan.)**

5. The Community will begin planning for the establishment of a 'settlement house' for Hamilton-Wentworth that can begin to address the needs of the immigrant, refugee and newcomer communities while also providing a coordinated service for families who cannot access the current shelter system. **(Planning for this Action will occur in year 1 of the Plan; implementation should occur in year 2.)**

6. A Working Group will be formed to determine the feasibility of establishing a homeless help group, based on a peer support model, that is run entirely by those who are experiencing homelessness, or have experienced homelessness. The Working Group will review the literature and talk to people who are experiencing homelessness to identify key elements of such a group and expected outcomes. **(Planning for this Action will occur in year 1 of the Plan, while implementation should begin in Year 2.)**

7. In order to provide a continuum of supports to those accessing shelters, the Shelter Working Group stressed that the community should enhance existing supports in locating and maintaining housing. Accordingly, the Group recommends stabilized and increased funding that will build on the Housing Help Centre's services including additional resources for:
   - Help line to provide housing support;
   - Finding/retaining housing;
   - Supports within housing to reduce the risk of losing that housing.

(This Action should commence in Year 1 of the Plan, and throughout the three year period as need arises.)

8. The Homelessness Steering Committee in concert with shelter providers should advocate with relevant levels of government to ensure that shelter funding models more accurately reflect the real current costs of providing shelter to individuals and families in our community. Currently, men's shelters receive $34.50 per day per client when actual costs are closer to $80 per day per client, while domestic violence shelters funding is based on an average occupancy rate that was determined in 1995, while occupancy rates have increased significantly since that time. **(The Action should commence immediately in year 1 of the Plan.)**

9. Funding should be made available for projects that will provide more transitional forms of shelter where individuals and families are offered a significantly longer stay, and supportive services that will help them to obtain housing. **(This Action should cover the entire 3 years of the Plan as projects are developed.)**

10. The Shelter Working Group will continue to focus on improvements to the shelter system; this group should contain representatives from the Region, from operators of shelters and from consumers. **(This Action should commence throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)**

11. The Hamilton Executive Directors' Aboriginal Coalition should work with shelter providers in the region to ensure that adequate statistics on Aboriginal use are collected. **(This Action should commence in year 1 of the Plan.)**

The following tables show the dramatic increase in emergency shelter use in the year and a half between November 1998 and March 2000. There was a 35% jump in the number of people needing emergency shelter.

Table 1: Shelter Usage 1998 : from Our Homes Our Streets: Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth

Name of Agency	June 1998				November 1998			
	Available Space	# of People	Occupancy Rate	# People Turned Away	Available Space	# of People	Occupancy Rate	# People Turned Away
Wesley Centre Drop In *	---	30	---	0	---	24	---	0
Salvation Army	38	38	100%	9	54	46	85%	0
Mission Services	24	23	96%	1	20	25	125%	7
Martha House	28	25	89%	2	28	28	100%	4
Native Women's Centre	10	8	80%	Not Available	10	5	50%	Not Available
Mary's Place	9	9	100%	0	9	9	100%	4
Interval House	20	15	Not Available	Not Available	20	9	Not Available	Not Available
Good Shepherd Men's Centre	25	17	68%	0	25	19	76%	1
Inasmuch House	28 (5) 3	9 (3)		3 (3)	28 (5)	7 (7)		4 (2)
H-W Detention Centre	---	1	---	---	---	0	---	---
Total		175				172		

* Wesley Centre Drop-In has no beds, but does provide mats on the floor. The numbers in this table represent the people who slept overnight, a significantly higher number of people accessed the emergency overnight drop-in, but did not sleepover.

Table: 2 Shelter Usage March 2000

NAME OF AGENCY	March 23rd 2000							
	# of Beds Available for Clients	# of people who stayed overnight in program	# of people who asked for but did NOT receive service	Occupancy Rate	Gender of Clients		Aboriginal Clients	
					M	F	M	F
Wesley Centre Drop In	50	50	0	100%	45	5	--	--
Salvation Army	54	63	--	1.16%	63	--	2	--
Mission Services	45	42	--	93%	42	--	--	--
Martha House	28	16	--	57%	--	16	--	--
Native Women's Centre	12	9	--	75%	1	8	1	8
Mary's Place	9	8	--	88%	--	8	--	--
Interval House	24	11	0	46%	--	11	--	--
Good Shepherd Men's Centre	25	17	--	68%	17	--	--	--
Inasmuch House	28	28	0	100%	8	22	--	--
H-W Detention Centre	--	--	--	---	--	--	--	--
Notre Dame House	20	19	--	95%	11	8	--	--
Totals	295	263	--		187	78	3	8

2. PRIORITY AREA/RECOMMENDATION — OUTREACH

Current outreach programs have been very effective at meeting the needs of people who are homeless and/or have mental health issues and/or are vulnerable to losing their housing. However, they are overwhelmed and are unable to meet the needs of many people without having a comprehensive 24-hour program of support, and an expanded and more coordinated structure. We recommend that the Community, the Region, and the Province work to expand our local outreach team to effectively meet the needs of people who have a mental health and/or addiction issues, have developmental or physical challenges and/or are struggling with issues of homelessness.

Current outreach programs such as COAST, Social & Public Health Assertive Outreach Team, Housing Help Centre Outreach, when working in conjunction with other outreach workers, have been very successful in connecting individuals and families with needed services, helping individuals and families to obtain housing, and providing individuals and families with the supportive services they need to remain in their housing. In the 1999/00 year, COAST served 99 people who were homeless, while the Public Health Team served 406 people, approximately 70% of people assisted were male.

There are a significant number of clients of shelters as well as a significant number of tenants who require professional support services to help them live in the community. The upcoming closures in mental health institutions will add to these pressures in Hamilton as well as other parts of Ontario. Outreach workers have been effective in meeting many needs of people who are homeless or are vulnerable to losing their housing but the demand for these services is great and is increasing.

Both the provincial government and the Region have recognized the importance of outreach workers by providing additional resources through the HOMES program as well as through support under the PHIF program.

ACTIONS

The Community Action Plan recommends:

1. Greater co-ordination of the existing street outreach services - co-ordination should also include those organizations involved in discharging people from institutions -- and building upon existing services to secure further funding from the federal government, the province, and the Region to be used to support a collaborative approach **(This Action will proceed in year 1 of the Plan and for the remaining 3 years in concert with the Outreach Working Group.)**

2. A 24 hour crisis outreach and peer support system be established. COAST has already submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to expand services to 24 hours (services are currently offered for 10 hours per day). Indeed such services have already been recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Health in their document, "Making it Happen" (1999), and by the Antidormi Inquest Recommendations from the Fall of 1999. **(This Action will proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

3. An Outreach Working Group has been struck and will be meeting in early September to begin the tasks of coordinating outreach services and identifying gaps in those services. The contact for that group is Valine Vaillancourt at Social and Public Health Services. The Homelessness Steering Committee will provide support and encouragement to help this coordination process to develop. **(This Action will continue throughout the 3 years of the Plan; the working group recommendations may be read-in to this Plan where appropriate.)**

3. RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that institutions and community members should develop a proactive, standardized discharge process based on the needs of the individual, to ensure they work more effectively.

ACTION

The Outreach Working Group, The Housing Help Centre, institution staff (including social workers responsible for discharge planning) and other appropriate agencies should establish a working group so that needs can be discussed and a system developed whereby individuals being discharged can be connected with community services. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

4. RECOMMENDATION

Current drop-ins were designed to meet the needs of single men, who are thought to have traditionally made up the largest proportion of people who are homeless. This means that many other groups of people feel uncomfortable in those contexts. We recommend that the Province and Region work to develop drop-ins to meet the needs of everyone, including those individuals who have traditionally experienced barriers in attempting to access services. Some of these groups include: immigrants and refugees, Aboriginal persons, visible minorities, youth, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons, women, and children. It is vitally important that all drop-ins are seen as welcoming environments to all members of our community.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee will request that a meeting of groups that work with recent immigrants, Aboriginal persons, visible minority youth, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons, and women's groups meet with representatives of drop-in centres as well representatives of the Region to begin to identify specific issues and solutions to improve this situation.

It should also be noted that Mary's Place is funded to provide a drop-in exclusively for women, but that program is often limited by the amount of space available on that shelter's physical premises.

5. RECOMMENDATION

More women and children are relying on meal programs for their food. Traditionally these programs were designed for men, and other groups may feel uncomfortable in these environments. We recommend that the community work to make meal programs more accessible for everyone by talking to affected groups and including them in the process of change.

The Homelessness Steering Committee will request that a meeting of groups that work with recent immigrants, Aboriginal persons, visible minority youth, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, and women's groups meet with representatives of meal program providers as well as representatives of the Region to begin to identify specific issues and solutions to improve this situation. It should be noted that the Good Shepherd Centre has applied for funding to renovate their dining area to provide better service to women and children.

The Province and Region ensure that any new support service designed to assist people who are homeless and who use shelters is directly accessible to clients of shelters at all times of the day. This would include services within and external to the shelters.

ACTIONS

This recommendation supports the point in the Shelter Priority recommendation that the needs of clients in shelters are complex and professional support services should be available 24 hours a day. This recommendation should be part of the discussions of the working groups, organized with the support of the Homelessness Steering Committee, to move towards the implementation of the Shelter Priority recommendation. **(This Action should be an ongoing process throughout the 3 years of the Plan, as needs are identified by the needs-assessment of the shelters, the Shelter Working Group, and the Outreach Working Group.)**

6. RECOMMENDATION:

There is increasing systemic pressure from institutions to have people placed back in the community as quickly as possible. This often makes it difficult to match people with the appropriate community resources. A number of crisis/transition beds would provide the time necessary to connect people with the appropriate community resources. We recommend the establishment of crisis/transitional beds for people who are recently discharged from hospital or from a correctional facility so that community organizations can match them with the supports and resources they need to live in the community.

ACTION

The Working Group established to address the discharge process should also develop proposals for funding of transition beds to assist in a person's move from an institution to the community. **(This Action will proceed throughout years 1 and 2 of the Plan.)**

7. RECOMMENDATION:

The stress of having to move out of a men's shelter every seven days makes it difficult to provide men with the support and stability necessary to get off the streets. We recommend that the "seven day rule" be changed so that men could remain in a shelter for the length of time deemed necessary to obtain more secure and appropriate housing.

ACTION

While the Region regularly approves extensions to hostel stays when requested by operators, the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter will work with the Region to develop policies that allow for longer stays in men's shelters. **(This Action will proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

8. RECOMMENDATION:

Each organization in the city has their own schedule for when people can access their meal program or foodbank, making it difficult for people to remember all the schedules. We recommend that the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter work with providers of meal programs and food banks to develop a more coordinated and simplified schedule of days and times when people can access food programs in the Region. (This Action will proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)

There are a number of places where people can go to get a free lunch or dinner in the city, but unless an individual is staying in a shelter, there are no breakfast programs they can access. We recommend that the Region fund breakfast programs for all people who need food at that time of day.

It is important to know who is providing food when, including breakfast for people who are not in emergency shelters.

ACTION

The regional government should undertake to find out quickly which agencies and organizations offer breakfast programs. This information should be shared with all organizations working with persons who are experiencing homelessness and other low-income members of our community who must rely on foodbanks. The Region should then fund breakfast programs in areas of the region where the existing programs are not sufficient. **(Action should begin in year 1 of the Plan.)**

9. RECOMMENDATION:

People who are homeless often experience increased health problems as a result of poor nutrition, exposure to harsh temperatures, inadequate sleep, and having to continually walk the streets.

These people also find it difficult to access services because there are long waiting lists and they often do not have calendars or watches to attend an appointment that is arranged for some future date. We recommend that the Province increase access to dental care and other needed health services for people who are homeless.

The Region does offer emergency dental services and has tried to work to make these services more available in the downtown area, by collaborating with other service providers. Unfortunately the Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre, which is now serving upwards of 5000 clients in all of their programs, reports that their oral health program is booked up for months in advance. If our community is to address the determinants of health (including poverty, isolation, mental illness, and racism) then it will be necessary to support important and innovative health service organizations such as the 'Core and the North Hamilton Community Health Centre.

ACTION

The Region should work with community agencies in order to expand the provision of health services for people who are homeless. If possible, a working group on homelessness and health should be formed that is made up of Service Providers, Regional Staff, consumers, and other interested agencies, in order to determine gaps in service. **(This Action should commence in year 1 of the Plan.)**

10. RECOMMENDATION:

Many people who are homeless have multiple problems that they are trying to address. They are also often fearful of approaching traditional health care services because of negative past experiences and/or embarrassment. We recommend that the Ministry of Health fund an integrated health care outreach team which can enhance current outreach teams in the region and address the health issues of people who are homeless.

ACTION

The Community Action Plan encourages the organizations working on the Community Outreach Priority recommendation to look at this issue. The lead contact for that Working Group is Valine Vaillancourt of Social and Public Health Services.

11. RECOMMENDATION:

People who are homeless are vulnerable to being robbed and do not have secure places to keep their belongings. As a result, many lack identification which makes it difficult to secure health care or social assistance. We recommend that the Federal government provide money to Regional Municipalities for the purpose of helping people secure adequate identification.

Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre currently offers a program whereby they assist individuals to secure identification.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee and other interested parties should work with the Region and Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre to ensure that there is a comprehensive program that will help individuals secure identification and thus allow those individuals the opportunity to access a continuum of supports.
(Action on this should begin in year 1 of the Plan.)

12. RECOMMENDATION:

To ensure that people who are homeless are able to have a continuity of support and access to programs, we recommend that the Region and Province immediately establish stable funding for existing or proposed 24-hour drop-ins.

The Wesley Drop-In Centre has been funded for the 24 hour drop-in from April 1, 2000 to March 31, 2001 through PHIF; currently, Wesley is developing programming for that initiative.

ACTION

This positive step should be continued on a permanent and stable basis by the Region and the Province. (Action should continue on this initiative throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)

4.5 Obtaining Housing

This section of the Action Plan will discuss strategies for assisting individuals to obtain safe and affordable housing and will also deal with ensuring that safe, affordable housing exists so that people can access it. Many of these individuals will be moving to housing from the shelter system, but it is important to note that many will not. As mentioned earlier in this report many individuals and families who are experiencing absolute homelessness do not access the shelter system. Therefore, while it is essential that the coordinated effort to assist those within the shelters is maintained and improved, it is also essential that avenues exist whereby those individuals and families who do not access the shelter system (as mentioned, those persons are often referred to as experiencing hidden homelessness) are also assisted. In addition, the reader will recall that this Action Plan acknowledges, as the United Nations has, that those individuals or families who are spending more than 50% of their income on housing are at risk of homelessness, as well as those individuals or families who are living in unsafe, inadequate, non-accessible, or non-permanent housing. Accordingly, this section deals with strategies to assist persons who are experiencing homelessness in obtaining housing (using the previously mentioned broad definition of "homelessness").

13. PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATION **HOUSING**

Affordable, adequate and safe housing is a key component to solving the homelessness crisis; including the preservation and development of both existing social housing stock and safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, permanent rental housing stock.

We recommend that SHAC work to ensure that the 700 scattered public housing units are not sold-off and that the provincial and federal governments renew their commitment to developing non-profit housing for low-income people. We also recommend that successful creative models of housing, as well as innovative ways to utilize existing non-profit housing stock, be explored for our community.

We also strongly recommend that the Provincial and Federal governments renew their commitment to developing non-profit housing for people who are homeless, families with low incomes, Aboriginal persons, youth, seniors, women, and singles in need of permanent affordable housing.

The Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth took a positive stand by passing a resolution in March of 2000 calling on the province not to move forward with their proposal to sell scattered public housing units. SHAC, the Social Planning and Research Council, the Housing Help Centre, as well as the Homelessness Steering Committee are also sending or have already sent letters to the province opposing this move. In addition, the Aboriginal community has advocated against the transfer of the Federal Urban Native Housing Program. SHAC is looking at other ways of working with Regional Council to stop this sale.

The Housing Help Centre indicates that they are willing to work cooperatively with not-for-profit housing providers and other interested parties to look at innovative models for utilizing our existing not-for-profit housing stock and the development of additional not-for-profit housing.

The Community Consultation process made quite clear that the construction of new financially assisted affordable housing is a crucial part of the solution to preventing homelessness and meeting housing needs in Hamilton-Wentworth. In addition, the Roomers & Boarders Committee indicates, that in order to ensure that housing is safe, secure, and adequate, inspections should be carried out in all rooming houses in the city, and tenants should be informed of their rights through education programs.

This is important to a 'continuum of supports' approach as those who live in rooming houses often experience poverty and are thus in danger of losing their housing, and regular inspections will help to ensure that rooming houses meet the housing requirements as set out in this Plan.

The Homelessness Steering Committee is pleased that the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth passed a resolution calling homelessness a national disaster and that the Region has strongly supported a national infrastructure program that will recognize that Federal government financial support for building new affordable community-based housing is an essential part of our community's infrastructure.

ACTIONS

1. Representatives of the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter, SHAC and the Homelessness Steering Committee should meet with members of the Regional Council's new Housing Committee in order to examine further ways to promote the Provincial and Federal government renewing a commitment to developing not-for-profit and co-operative housing. The Housing Help Centre has indicated that they are willing to also work with the Committees. The Homelessness Project Coordinator should also contact the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, the Golden Horseshoe Cooperative

Housing Federation, and other interested bodies to generate support for this initiative. **(Action should occur as soon as possible in year 1 of the Plan)**

2. The Housing Help Centre indicates that they are willing to work cooperatively with not-for-profit and other interested parties to look at innovative models for utilizing our existing non-profit housing stock and the development of additional not-for-profit housing. **(Action for this planning should begin in year 1 of the Plan; any proposals arising should be considered in years 2 and 3.)**

3. Support should be made available to tenant advocacy groups that are seeking to preserve existing social housing stock or advocating for its expansion. **(Depending on response from such groups, action on this should begin in either year 1 or year 2 of the Plan.)**

4. The Roomers & Boarders Committee will work with the Region to ensure that adequate inspections of rooming houses are carried out, and will work with other interested parties to develop educational programs so that rooming house tenants know their rights and are therefore more able to address any inadequate living conditions they may encounter. **(Action will proceed throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)**

14. RECOMMENDATION:

The Region of Hamilton-Wentworth should financially support services that reach out to those who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of losing their housing. Specialized assistance for those who face barriers in finding adequate housing (through support during the housing) search process and by advocating on behalf of people who at risk of losing their housing - is a necessity for many in the community so that they may obtain and maintain housing.

The Housing Help Centre, as well as other front-line workers, currently provide these services in the community. Through the PHIF funding, the region has expanded the activities of the Housing Help Centre to include outreach. It should be noted that the administration of the Community Partners funding for the Housing Help Centre had its administration transferred from the province to the Region on January 1, 2000. Because the Housing Help Centre was devolved to the Region at the end of 1999, there was concern at the time of the "Our Homes and Our Streets" report that the Housing Help Centre might lose its funding. This has not been the case. However, many community organizations have faced decreased or stagnating funding for many years, while at the same time demand for services has continued to increase. The Homelessness Steering Committee and the Social Planning and Research Council should begin a process of studying the impact of this trend and examine ways to reverse it.

When discussing the crisis in our community, it should be acknowledged that the Housing Help Centre must be an integral part of any strategy. This organization serves both those who are accessing the community shelter system, as well as those who are experiencing homelessness in different ways, and has also helped to develop a number of innovative projects (such as the LINKS voice mail project which provides voice mail service at a very low cost to economically disadvantaged people; this service has assisted individuals and families in finding housing and accessing health and social services). It is also an organization that, like many others in our community, has served record numbers of individuals and families in the past year. As mentioned, in 1999, the Housing Help Centre had approximately 20,000 contacts with people who were homeless or in danger of losing their housing. Unfortunately, this represented approximately an 11% increase to 1998's record numbers.

ACTIONS

1. As the demand for housing support services increases, funding should reflect those increases.
2. The Social Planning and Research Council should study the state of funding for community based organizations and demand for services.
3. The LINKS Voice Mail Project should receive stable funding to provide voice mail services to homeless and economically disadvantaged people at an affordable cost. **(Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan)**

15. RECOMMENDATION:

Waiting lists for safe, medium term housing for women who are leaving abusive situations are very long. We recommend that the Province reinstate and stabilize funding to transitional housing services so that this community can meet the medium term needs of women leaving abusive situations.

At Second Stage Housing, 156 women were referred to 20 units in 1998; at Phoenix Place, between 90-100 women (plus their approximately 100 children) applied to live in the facility's 10 units last year. Both transitional housing providers have unacceptably long waiting lists for housing. The transitional supportive housing model greatly decreases the rate at which women return to their abusive partners because it provides the supports needed for women to truly be able to leave abusive relationships. There is a great and urgent need for the province to move quickly on this recommendation.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee should work with the Women's Abuse Working Group and other interested parties to ensure that funding is made available for these innovative transitional programs. **(Action for the recommendation should begin in year 1 of the Plan.)**

16. RECOMMENDATION:

Procedures to establish bank accounts for people who have limited identification should be reviewed, along with Ontario Works (OW) procedures that require the establishment of a bank account in order to continue receiving benefit.

The ODSP and OW programs encourage the opening of a bank account for the purpose of direct deposit but it is not a mandatory requirement in order to receive social assistance. It should also be acknowledged that there is a need for flexibility in dealing with those persons who are living with a disability, as they may not be able to easily meet such requirements.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee will request that an educational session be organized involving the relevant provincial and regional social assistance staff as well as community groups which deal with social assistance recipients so that rules regarding the opening of bank accounts and other matters (such as rules regarding social assistance benefits for those incarcerated and the rules regarding the Community Start Up Benefit) be clarified. **(The Action should proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

17. RECOMMENDATION:

Our Research process found that there are some people whose desperate need for affordable housing may not be recognized by the modified chronological system that the Community Housing Access Network uses to create their waiting list. We recommend that the Community Housing Access Network (CHAN) work with the province to explore how people are affected by the current waiting list model and the ways that it might be adapted to meet people's needs more effectively.

CHAN's waiting list for priority assisted housing applicants has risen 1/3 between 1998 and 1999, and turnover in the assisted rental units is way down. In March 2000 there were 44 applicants with priority (family violence) status.

With the lack of turnover and no new assisted housing being built, CHAN has very little room to accommodate people, regardless of changes to the waiting list system.

The modified chronological system that CHAN is required by the province to use, does not give any priority to many people who are in urgent need, such as individuals living in non-accessible units who need accessible units, or individuals who are living in over-crowded units. In addition, many individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness lose their spot on the waiting list as soon as they find housing even if that housing does not meet their needs and is temporary.

ACTION

The Solutions for Housing Action Committee and the Housing Help Centre will work with CHAN on this recommendation. **(Action should proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

18. RECOMMENDATION:

It remains difficult for people who are transient, illiterate or for whom English is not a language they are comfortable communicating in to remain on the social housing waiting list. We recommend that the Community Housing Access Network (CHAN) work with the Province to explore ways to ensure that people with literacy or language difficulties remain on the list despite problems in responding to written or oral requests for information.

Since last Fall CHAN has contacted member non-profit housing providers to find out which staff speak languages other than English in order to use them as a resource for clients who need translation. CHAN has also been accessing translation services from SISO. In addition, CHAN has changed its application form to allow applicants to indicate what language they need information in.

It is vitally important to acknowledge that everyone, but especially those who are not fully literate or for whom English or French is not their first language, needs to be able to easily get information about their application in a way that is easily understandable and respectfully given. The necessary time needs to be taken with applicants to ensure that they are fully informed and understand the status of their application, what information is needed to complete their application, and what information may help them access housing faster.

CHAN has also implemented a policy to allow persons who are homeless and who have applied for assisted housing to use the Housing Help Centre as a place of contact if the individual indicates to the Housing Help Centre that they would like to do so.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee will forward a copy of this report to CHAN and request a meeting with the board of CHAN in order to work further on implementing the relevant recommendations. **(Action will proceed on this recommendation in Year 2 of the Plan.)**

19. RECOMMENDATION:

It is clear from our research that many youth who are living with psychiatric or developmental problems or who are homeless or who are trying to leave abusive family situations are not having their needs met by the mainstream school system. Waiting lists for alternative schools are quite long. We recommend that the Ministry of Education increase the resources committed to providing alternative schools for youth that cannot manage within the mainstream school system.

To help youth facing challenges, a program at Notre Dame has been established.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee should call a meeting of the Boards of Education, agencies dealing with youth, and other interested parties (including the Housing Help Centre who have offered assistance) to research the current situation with regard to alternative schools and advocate for more funding for these schools. **(Action should proceed in Year 2 of the Plan.)**

20. RECOMMENDATION:

Upon release from prison many people are vulnerable to becoming homeless because they have lost their accommodation, their belongings and have been cut off ODSP. We recommend that ODSP be reworked so those people can return to their previous involvement with the program even after incarceration. That is, benefits should be automatically re-instated after incarceration.

ACTION

The community legal clinics and the Housing Help Centre will approach organizations working with people released from prison in order to review both the ODSP and housing challenges faced by those who are recently released and who have to reapply for ODSP. Former ODSP clients who have been released from incarceration should have there ODSP reinstated immediately rather than reapplying through the regular process. **(Action should proceed throughout the 3 years of this Plan.)**

21. RECOMMENDATION:

Recently the Housing Development Group completed a report, entitled "Supported Housing for People with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness: A Plan for Hamilton-Wentworth", with recommendations as to how the Region could meet the supportive housing needs of people with mental health issues. We recommend that the Region ensure the recommendations of the Housing Development Group are implemented to provide an effective system of support.

Regional Council is on record as supporting the recommendations of the Housing Development group and has assigned staff to work with the community on the next phase of this report. We recommend that this work be continued in co-ordination with the Supporting Housing Co-ordination Network, the District Health Council and the Regional Psychiatry Program.

The HOMES program, a recent initiative of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care coordinated locally by the Good Shepherd, provides permanent supportive housing for people who are experiencing homelessness and are dealing with serious and persistent mental illness.

As of July 17, 2000 62 people are housed through HOMES with another 38 units waiting to come on line later this year. It should be noted that, if approved, the second phase of the HOMES Program will add 99 units to the program (the first phase provided 100 units The program is linked with the shelters and assist individuals with a serious mental illness into permanent housing. The lead contact for this program is Brother Richard MacPhee of Good Shepherd Non-Profit Homes.

ACTION

The Supporting Housing Coordination Network, the Good Shepherd, Regional staff, and other interested parties should work to ensure that the recommendations of the Housing Development Group are implemented. **(Action should proceed throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)**

22. RECOMMENDATION:

There is some concern over the variation in quality of Second Level Lodging Homes. Some of this might be addressed by providing increased training and support to staff within these homes. We recommend that the Region work with support agencies to identify training programs and support needs for staff in Second Level Lodging Homes.

There is a Second Level Lodging Home Education Committee, chaired by staff from the Region. The committee membership includes Lodging Home Operators, Regional Staff and staff from community agencies. The committee surveys the staff of lodging homes to find out what their educational needs are and organizes seminars on a monthly basis. Information is also distributed to lodging home staff who do not attend the meetings.

ACTION

1. One area in which training should be provided is with regard to rights and obligations under the Tenant Protection Act, under which Second Level Lodging Homes and their tenants are governed. This training should be made available to operators, staff and tenants.
2. The Region should also work closely with the Supporting Housing Coordinated Network, the Second Level Lodging Home Tenant's Committee, the Second Level Lodging Home Advocacy Coalition, and the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth's Second Level Lodging Home By-Law *Ad Hoc* Committee, as well as Second Level Lodging Home operators, in addressing this recommendation. It should be noted that as well as support needs for staff, issues of 'privacy', 'safety', and 'autonomy' will need to be addressed.

We recommend that operators of second level lodging homes continue to be included, and that tenant advocacy groups are also included, in any education or information program offered by the region or the province when the issues affect clients of second level lodging homes or the homes themselves. **(Action should continue throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)**

23. RECOMMENDATION:

In addition to training staff in Second Level Lodging Homes, we recommend that the Second Level Lodging Home licensing body look into the possibility of tying mandatory staff training to licensing.

It should be noted that the draft second level lodging home by-law currently under discussion by the Region includes a requirement for staff training.

ACTION

Second Level Lodging Home licensing should be tied to mandatory staff training.
(Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)

24. RECOMMENDATION:

The Region should move to lower the property tax rate for multi-residential buildings closer to that of residential buildings in order to promote rental housing affordability.

ACTION

In the Fall of 2000 SHAC should formally request a meeting with the finance department of the Region involving tenant advocates and the Hamilton and District Apartment Association to discuss this issue. Currently, property tax rates that are passed on to tenants through rents, are higher than those paid by property owners.

The finance department should specifically undertake research as to the impact of lowering the multi-residential property tax rate on rents as well as potential impact on other tax rates. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

25. RECOMMENDATION:

In order to address the concern that not all social service agency staff are trained to meet the multiple and complex needs of people who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing, we recommend that the Region develop a joint staff training program to ensure all health and social service agency staff and students throughout the community are educated about homelessness, and about the diverse and complex needs of those families who are experiencing homelessness.

This Action Plan recognizes that any lack of understanding on the part of social service agency staff when dealing with persons who have multiple and/or complex needs is a significant barrier to those individuals with regard to their ability to obtain safe, affordable housing.

ACTION

The Region should work with agencies that deal with homelessness, Mohawk Social Services Worker Program, McMaster School of Social Work, and with interested individuals and other parties, to develop training programs that address the complex and diverse needs of the community experiencing homelessness. SISO and the Housing Help Centre have also offered to work with the Region on this initiative. **(Planning for this Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan; Implementation should begin in year 2 of the Plan.)**

26. RECOMMENDATION:

Our research clearly shows that youth are vulnerable to becoming homeless. The current policies regarding whether youth can access social assistance programs results in some youth having to survive without any income whatsoever. We recommend that the Province ensure that 16 and 17 year olds can receive social assistance without having to meet the requirement of school attendance. This is especially important for youth that are unable to access school as a result of missing the enrolment deadline or because of a documented inability to manage within the school system.

It is imperative that youth that are vulnerable to becoming homeless are not barred from receiving social assistance. It is vitally important that the community ensures that all youth that would otherwise be eligible for social assistance are not barred from doing so because they are not attending school.

ACTION

The Homeless Steering Committee and the Housing Help Centre should arrange a joint meeting with the Region and organizations which work with street youth to clarify the rules in this area and to ensure that if a youth is not enrolled in school they should not be made ineligible. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

27. RECOMMENDATION:

The Region should make the Community Start-Up Benefit more widely and consistently known.

The Community Start-Up Benefit is available to families up to a maximum of $1500 per year, and to individuals up to a maximum of $799 per year. In order to receive the benefit a person must qualify for Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Benefits and be moving because current housing is harmful to the persons health, or be leaving an institution that provides for that person's basic needs and shelter. Some harmful situations that may require a person to move include; family violence or abuse, homelessness, eviction, substandard housing conditions, rent that is too high, or a person who is a single parent in need of independent housing. There is also a fairly complicated appeal process for those who are refused.

There is a need for a meeting between regional, provincial social assistance staff and community organizations that work with social assistance clients to ensure that information on this option is widely circulated.

ACTION

The community legal clinics in conjunction with the Housing Help Centre and the Region will work to coordinate with other individuals and agencies to ensure that information on the Community Start-Up Benefit is widely circulated. **(This Action will proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

28. RECOMMENDATION:

Planning should be undertaken by the Region and community groups to provide for the housing needs of youth, seniors and persons with addictions.

ACTION

There has already been a considerable amount of work done in the community regarding these issues. The Region and Community groups, in conjunction with the Homelessness Steering Committee, should investigate this research and create an on-going dialogue with regard to planning. The Solutions for Housing Action Committee, and the Housing Help Centre will provide input and assistance with regard to this recommendation.

(This Action will proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)

4.6 Housing Stability

This section of the Action plan outlines the recommendations (including two Priority recommendations) dealing with the ability of individuals or families to keep their housing. While the Poverty Priority recommendation and the Continuance of Benefits Priority recommendation both deal with issues of advocacy, the amount of support shown for these two recommendation at the Community Forums serves to confirm the assertion, found in "Our Homes and Our Streets" and widely acknowledged, that poverty is a root cause of our homelessness crisis. It is the position of this Action Plan that no matter how much housing is available, if that housing is unaffordable, then people cannot access it. Only rent-geared-to-income social housing can meet the needs of those in poverty (although even rent-geared-to-income housing cannot meet the needs of some of the very poor as mentioned earlier). Further, if a significant effort is not made to ensure that individuals and families do not lose their housing then we will see greater numbers of persons who experience periodic and chronic homelessness. It must be acknowledged that without significant supports for housing stability all supportive services and shelters will be forced to deal with greater and greater stress on resources due to larger numbers of persons experiencing absolute homelessness.

29. PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATION: REINSTATEMENT OF BENEFITS

Poverty remains one of the single most important factors leading to homelessness. Current social assistance levels result in people being extremely vulnerable to losing their housing or being unable to secure adequate housing. We recommend a reinstatement of the 21.6 % that was cut from social assistance rates in 1995. Additionally, that percentage should also reflect inflation rates since 1995. Thus social assistance rates should be reinstated by 27.5%

We also recommend the creation of a formula which would base the shelter portion of social assistance rates on the average rent of a vacant rental market unit (appropriate to family size) in the Region.

Further, although ODSP recipients did not experience the 21.6% cutback in assistance, they have not received increases since 1995 and so should receive a 5.9% increase for inflation as well as a re-instatement of the many discretionary benefits that have been removed from ODSP.

As stated earlier in this report, the significant reduction in social assistance rates in October, 1995 has made it much more difficult for social assistance recipients to afford their current housing or to try to obtain new housing. The shelter allowance portion of the social assistance rates do not come close to paying for the average rents in Hamilton. The maximum shelter allowance for a single person in 1999 of $325 falls far below the average rent of $526 for a one-bedroom apartment in Hamilton (from the April, 2000 statistics in "Vacant Rental Market Study Eleven Year Summary: Data 1990-2000" by the Housing Help Centre).

The reduction in social assistance rates have also significantly increased the need for local services such as foodbanks to supplement basic necessities for individuals and families whose assistance rates are woefully inadequate.

Those involved in the discussion of this issue recognize the significant challenge involved in trying to change a major policy position of the Ontario government. However, many feel that the issue is so important in impacting homelessness and housing needs, that this recommendation must be a priority of the Community Action Plan.

The implementation plan developed by the Working Group (the Homelessness Initiative Campaign for Adequate Welfare, or HICFAW) recognized that a change in this provincial policy, occurring through a change in the regulations under the Ontario Works Act, may take three to four years to fully achieve.

ACTIONS

A community working group has been struck. The Homelessness Initiative Campaign for Adequate Welfare ("HICFAW") will work to develop an effective campaign to lobby governments and develop community support for the priority. Some facets of that campaign include:

1. Hold a community forum on the issue of the inadequacy of social assistance rates and the impact of these low rates on homelessness;
2. Research the current market rents for vacant apartments and compare to maximum Ontario Works shelter allowances, and then publicize the inadequacies of the shelter allowance rates;
3. Contact non-profit housing providers, as part of this research, to compare eviction rates before the social assistance rate reductions with the period after the social assistance rate reductions. This research work and publicizing should be carried out in the Fall of 2000 as the beginning of an ongoing advocacy campaign;
4. Work with lead advocates to build support for this policy change by building public awareness through tools such as sample letters;

5. Encourage the lead Hamilton-Wentworth advocates on this issue to link with provincial organizations involved in this issue such as the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and other organizations. These organizations may be interested in coordinating efforts once our community has begun to implement its own strategies. **(These Actions should occur throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)**

30. PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATION: INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND BENEFITS

Social assistance procedures should be changed to allow a resident who is temporarily hospitalized, or incarcerated, to continue to pay their rent and hold their apartment until discharge (some limits will apply)

There is considerable uncertainty among some social service agencies regarding the social assistance rules for clients who are institutionalized in provincial facilities such as hospitals and correctional centres for a short period of time, and the Social Benefits Tribunal has noted some ambiguity in the Ontario Disability Support Program Act. It should also be noted that the legislation does allow a certain amount of grace (to persons entering a hospital particularly: a person on OW who is incarcerated immediately loses their benefits).

The social assistance system policy varies depending on whether a person on social assistance has been incarcerated or hospitalized, whether they are a single person or part of a family unit, and whether the individual is an Ontario Works or ODSP client.

The concern is that persons on social assistance who are incarcerated and lose their benefits or have the shelter portion reduced will lose their rental homes and will find it difficult to find an available rental unit. If, for example, a social assistance recipient spends 2 months in a corrections facility and loses the social assistance benefits (and therefore their apartment) then it will be very difficult in finding a new willing landlord to rent this person an apartment. The person might also experience homelessness on discharge and until such time as social assistance benefits are re-instated. It would be helpful in preventing homelessness if social assistance would continue to pay the rent for the short-term and therefore not have this person end up in a shelter or other temporary accommodation.

The current policies of the social assistance system need to be understood by agencies that work with clients who are incarcerated in provincial facilities. The social assistance policies specifically need to be changed for those who face short-term incarceration in correctional facilities in order to prevent future homelessness.

ACTIONS

The Homelessness Steering Committee, the community legal clinics, the Housing Help Centre and Settlement and Integration Services Organization, should undertake to:

1. Contact the committee compromised of provincial and regional social assistance government staff in order to request that an information and education session on this issue for affected agencies and organizations be held in order to clarify the Ontario Works and ODSP rules on treatment of those who are incarcerated in provincial facilities. **(This Action should commence in year 1 of the Plan.)**

2. Approach different community organizations which work with ex-correctional facility inmates to lead the local advocacy work to undertake a change in the provincial Ontario Works and OSDP policies; **(This Action will commence in year 2 of the Plan.)**

   Suggest that the lead advocates in Hamilton-Wentworth liaise with other organizations in Ontario. Given that the rules regarding social assistance payments are province wide regulations, this is necessary in order to advocate for the needed provincial changes. It is likely that this provincial policy change may take two to three years to implement. **(This Action will proceed for the 3 years of the Plan.)**

It should also be noted that the Community Start Up Benefit (CSUB) for social assistance recipients may be issued for the payment of last months rent at the discretion of the administrator. As was stated earlier in this Plan, information about this benefit should be made more widespread to clients and organizations working with social assistance clients.

31. PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATION: FOOD SECURITY

It is often through the services provided by foodbanks and meal programs that people living on inadequate incomes are able to maintain their housing. Therefore, all levels of government should commit to ensuring local food security and the community should explore creative ways to address the root causes of hunger, since those programs are not a sustainable or adequate solution to the problem of hunger in our community.

It is recommended that the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter contact appropriate organizations to prepare a research proposal for the HRDC's Supported Community Partnership Initiatives program to look at effective ways to encourage collective kitchens, community gardens, and other sustainable models of food security, in Hamilton-Wentworth. Such a proposal should also examine systemic barriers to food security.

However, it is crucial that food security is maintained at this time of crisis in our community. Currently, most food programs are staffed primarily by volunteers and food stock is made up of donations.

If food security is to be maintained in this time of increasing demand, it is necessary that those who access these services obtain nutritionally adequate food, and that programs are able to keep up with increasing demand. It should also be noted that although this recommendation appears under this section, meal programs are vitally important to those who are experiencing absolute homelessness.

For the past several years, meal programs and particularly food-banks have become a vital support to families by helping them to keep a roof over their head. 'Pay the rent or feed the kids' is a common dilemma facing many families at risk of going hungry. The expansion and intensification of poverty in the region has also meant an increase in street youth, the elderly, and persons with mental illnesses who are accessing food services. In addition, increases in the numbers of immigrants, refugees, and persons from other diverse communities represent a need for interpretation services and cultural sensitivity in all agencies dealing with food security.

Due to these changes, the need to have skilled front line staff is imperative since the reasons for accessing food-banks are as diverse as the community that is accessing food-banks. Assisting people with emergency groceries or a hot meal is also a complex issue requiring more resources to raise more food, and particularly more nutritious and culturally diverse foods, as the number of people in need increases. The ability to expand these resources is greatly dependent upon the support of the local community.

The Food Focus Group, made up of emergency food providers, notes that the following measures are critical in order to address the food security issues related to homelessness:

- the need to include the support and awareness of our broader community such as: local citizens, government, other agencies dealing with homelessness, and the corporate sector;
- the need to assess current resources and identify what other resources are needed;

- the need for more skilled and trained staff for front line work,
- and the need to offer more nutritious and culturally diverse foods on an ongoing basis.

Table 4: Food Bank Statistics*

	March 1999	March 2000	Year 1998	Year 1999
Welcome Inn	458	504	3,623	4,783
Salvation Army	2,235	1,443	18,115	22,248
Mission Services	714	886	6,825	8,022
Neighbour to Neighbour	2,884	3,025	6,610	6,243
Central Presbyterian Church		46		249
St. Matthews House	3,748	3,786	46,123	45,442
St. Joseph's Church		44		830
Good Shepherd	2,998	2,791	29,645	30,794
Operation Blessing	2,158	1,187	14,875	16,591
Living Water Ministries	210	58	3428	1526
Total	15,405	13,770	129,244	136,728

** per person/family*

Table 5: Soup Van and Meal Programs*

	March 1999	March 2000	Year 1998	Year 1999
Wesley Drop Inn	3,503	3,985	52,000	51,836
Good Shepherd	6,634	9,020	83,735	105,128
Salvation Army	9,186	10,280	93,973	120,343
St. Matthew's House	499	466	4,668	4,601
Total	19,822	23,751	234,376	281,908

ACTIONS

1. a) That all emergency food providers participate in the following activities:
   - a process of assessing and evaluating the existing resources, identifying the deficiencies and recommending the resources required to meet the current need;
   - the submission of the information needed to determine the number of families and individuals accessing food banks and hot meal problems and any developing trends in the use of these services.

   b) Also, to ensure that this information is collected in a timely fashion, that a proposal is submitted for the hiring of a staff resource person to research and produce a report highlighting current services available, current needs being met, and gaps within the existing services. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

2. That the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter develop a public awareness campaign on hunger related issues that achieves the following:
   - tells the personal stories of individuals and families who are experiencing poverty;
   - identifies the major causes of hunger in our community;
   - identifies emergency food services as an important service with the ability to connect individuals and families to other supportive services relating to homelessness and poverty;
   - engages the broader community to actively support emergency food services in our local community. **(This Action should proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

3. That the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter contact appropriate organizations to prepare a research proposal that will look at effective ways to encourage collective kitchens, community gardens, and other innovative and sustainable models of food security for Hamilton-Wentworth. That research should also examine systemic barriers to food security in the community. **(This Action should proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

32. RECOMMENDATION:

People who are receiving social assistance often find it difficult to secure adequate housing because they are unable to pay first and last month's rent. Other individuals and families find themselves in a financial crisis, which results in them not being able to pay one or two month's rent. This leaves them vulnerable to eviction. We recommend that the Region assist in funding an emergency loan program on an ongoing basis to help provide emergency financial resources for tenants who are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Housing Emergency Loan Program ("HELP") is a community-based initiative that was developed to help respond to the housing and homelessness crisis in our community. HELP has received $32,000 in PHIF funding for the loan fund in phase II and funding for a part time co-ordinator in phase III. As of April 2000, 93 tenant households have been assisted in remaining in their homes by a HELP loan. The average loan size was $450.00. Unfortunately, HELP has been obliged to suspend making loans and is in a resource crisis, as almost all loan money has been distributed, but repayments and new contributions from the community have not yet replenished the fund. Annual resources are required to ensure that funds are always available for applicants that meet the criteria.

ACTION

Annual funding should be made available to the Housing Emergency Loan Program to ensure that those who qualify can access this service. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

The Solutions for Housing Action Committee will monitor this recommendation.

33. RECOMMENDATION:

Tenants continue to be confused about the new *Tenant Protection Act*. Many people are unsure of their rights and responsibilities. Some tenants also state that they still face discrimination in the rental housing market. We recommend that the Region and Province provide resources to tenant organizations, and other housing/legal agencies, to provide education for tenants. Tenant organizations have extensive experience in these areas and provide an important service to the community because they are led by tenants themselves.

It is necessary to educate tenants of their rights under the *Tenant Protection Act* in order to prevent homelessness. Without this information, tenants may assume that they have no recourse when a dispute arises with a landlord. In order to ensure that tenants are aware of their rights under the Act it is necessary that information on tenant rights is circulated widely throughout the community.

ACTION

The Lay Advocacy Group should prepare proposals for a variety of potential funders (SCPI, United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth, Hamilton Community Foundation, next allocation of PHIF), to resource a tenants organization in this community. **(This Action should commence in year 1 of the Plan.)**

34. RECOMMENDATION:

Our research suggests that there are some creative, effective, supportive and transitional housing programs in our community and other communities in Canada, the United States, and other countries. Having descriptions of these projects may help us implement these effective programs more broadly. We recommend that a process of gathering descriptions of effective supportive and transitional housing programs begin and those models used to guide the development of a varied continuum of supportive housing.

A proposal for Crisis/Transition beds is under development by the Supporting Housing Co-ordination Network.

ACTION

Funding for comparative research on successful supportive and transitional housing come from the HRDC's Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives program. It should also be noted that the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association is working on a comprehensive listing of all PHIF funded initiatives across the province.

This could provide useful comparative information when completed. **(This Action should proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

The Solutions for Housing Action Committee and the Housing Help Centre will take a lead role in ensuring that there is action on this recommendation.

35. RECOMMENDATION:

Community organizations should evaluate the eviction prevention program being run by the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) in Toronto, and if it is seen to be effective in preventing evictions, adapt the program for Hamilton and approach the Region for funding this type of activity.

Such a pilot project, based on a similar project being run by the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation in Toronto, has already been initiated in the community. The Hamilton Eviction Prevention Project, an initiative of the community legal clinics and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee, is designed to assist tenants who are in receipt of an eviction application to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal. The project involves contacting tenants by mail or telephone to inform them of their rights and obligations under the Tenant Protection Act. The overall goal of the project is to prevent homelessness by providing tenants with information and resources to maintain their current housing or the time to find alternative housing. The specific goals of the project include:

- Informing tenants about the process involved in dealing with an eviction application.
- Informing tenants that there are ways to fight an eviction application.
- Empowering those who wish to object to the eviction application on their own, by providing the necessary information.
- Referring tenants to the appropriate agency to provide assistance in regard to the eviction application and related matters.
- Collecting information to assist in developing effective prevention strategies.

ACTION

This project should be provided with stable funding and should report back to the Homelessness Steering Committee and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee on a regular basis. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

36. RECOMMENDATION:

The dramatic increase in the number of rental units that have been converted to condominiums since the introduction of the *Tenant Protection Act* may represent a threat to the current rental housing stock, but we need more information and time to fully assess what this increase means. We recommend that Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC) continue to monitor the situation with respect to the rates of conversions of rental housing to condominiums so that we may fully understand its impact on our housing stock. SHAC should also support the Region in its efforts to maintain municipal authority to preserve rental housing.

SHAC has worked closely with the municipal government in supporting regional legislation, which would give Hamilton the clear authority to protect its rental housing from conversion to condominium and from demolition. SHAC has also worked positively with municipal planners in trying to challenge Ontario Municipal Board rulings, which threaten our supply of affordable housing stock.

It is important that SHAC continues to work closely with the municipality as this issue unfolds as needed rental housing in the Region must be protected.

SHAC would like to see the Region regularly report on the number of rental housing units in Hamilton-Wentworth lost or threatened by demolition or conversion to condominiums.

ACTION

The Solutions for Housing Action Committee will work closely with the municipality to protect rental housing stock from conversion to condominiums, advocate for the protection of our rental housing stock, and collect statistics around the number of rental housing units converted to condominiums in our community. **(This Action will proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

37. RECOMMENDATION:

Some tenants remain in units they can not afford until they are evicted because they cannot afford to move out of the unit. Other people stay in accommodation that is unsafe or inadequate for similar reasons. We recommend that the Region support the establishment of a moving program, which could help move tenants for an affordable (or free) cost.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee will meet with the Region and other organizations to explore the feasibility of a moving program. **(This Action will occur in year 3 of the Plan.)**

38. RECOMMENDATION:

There are some people in the Region who find it difficult to manage their money and want support to ensure that their bills are paid on time. Without this support some people are vulnerable to becoming homeless. We recommend that the Province immediately re-establish the Voluntary Trustee Program so that people can have support to manage their money if they feel they require that help.

During community consultation for this Plan, it was made clear through key informant interviews that a voluntary trustee program has made a great difference to some individuals who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. This is a much-needed program. However, it is important that certain critical aspects of such a program be considered when looking at its development. For instance, trustees should not be in a conflict of interest position, and the program should be client-focused and operate according to an empowerment model.

ACTION

The Homelessness Steering Committee will connect with other interested agencies who may be interested in developing proposals for the establishment of the Voluntary Trustee Program. **(This Action will proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

4.7 Policy, Administration and Research

39. PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATION: **HOMELESSNESS PROJECT COORDINATOR**

It takes time and resources to coordinate a community's efforts to address homelessness. Without dedicated staff resources and an adequate budget, this work could not take place. Resources should be made available from all levels of government to fund the Homelessness Project Coordinator position, and to ensure that adequate staffing is made available to provide support to existing community based organizations and governments to help implement these recommendations.

Through the PHIF allocations from the Regional government, and HRDC funding, a full-time Homelessness Project Coordinator position has been created to provide support for the implementation of the Community Action Plan and other activities of the Homelessness Steering Committee for 1 year. The Homelessness Project Coordinator is Craig Foye. Craig can be reached at the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth.

ACTION

Funding should be made available for the Homelessness Project Coordinator position for the 3 years of the Plan. As well, funding should be made available for other staffing requirements, as determined by the Homelessness Steering Committee, that arise during the implementation of this Plan. **(This Action will proceed throughout the 3 years of the Plan.)**

40. RECOMMENDATION:

The current process of collecting statistics around evictions does not provide the community with much information about how the process is impacting tenants. We recommend that the Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC) and the community legal clinics work with other agencies province-wide, the Housing Tribunal and the Province so that an adequate system of obtaining information around eviction rates and the situations that result in evictions can be established and shared with community groups.

ACTION

The Solutions for Housing Action Committee and representatives of the three community legal clinics in Hamilton-Wentworth should meet with the manager of the Hamilton Area office of the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal, and coordinate with other agencies, and individuals, across the province, in order to begin the discussions around research and statistics. Eviction statistics should be included in future annual reports on homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth.

41. RECOMMENDATION:

The Region should provide mechanisms for direct community involvement in municipal discussions about downloading of social housing and other housing matters.

ACTION

The regional government's Social Housing Transitions Advisory Committee (SHTAC) has provided for some community involvement but the Community Action Plan calls upon the Region to ensure that when major decisions are being made which will affect the residents of social housing, there is a process to ensure resident and community input. SHAC's representative on the transition committee should convey this recommendation to the rest of the committee. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

42. RECOMMENDATION:

Many people in our community hold stereotypes about people who are homeless which makes it difficult to meet the needs of this vulnerable group.

We recommend that the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC) work together to develop public education campaigns that can increase public understanding of the issues facing people who are homeless. Financial resources from all levels of government as well as from community organizations will be necessary to do this outreach. Any public education campaign must involve people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

ACTION

The Solutions for Housing Action Committee, and the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter, in conjunction with the Homelessness Steering Committee, should develop a public education campaign on homelessness. This campaign should provide avenues for input from, and reflect the needs of, particularly vulnerable groups and individuals. The Housing Help Centre has also offered their assistance in the development and implementation of such a campaign. This type of campaign may be considered under the SCPI program. **(This Action should proceed in year 2 of the Plan.)**

43. RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that when services are proposed, there should be a request for proposals so that the community can have input into the process.

ACTION

When new funding or new services are proposed, those initiatives should proceed under a 'request for proposals' model to ensure that the best services are made available in the community. **(This Action should proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

44. RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that necessary funding is made available to develop an annual process of updating the "Our Homes and Our Streets" report. This updating should include community consultation in preparing the report as well as discussing success in meeting the needs of diverse cultural and vulnerable groups in the community such as: people who are poor, people with mental health difficulties, people with physical or developmental disabilities, youth, the elderly, people with HIV/AIDS; Immigrants, refugees and newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal persons, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, visible minorities, women, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, people who experience barriers because of their gender identity, people with addictions, and sex trade workers. (This is not an exhaustive list.)

This would help to ensure that a current, accurate picture of homelessness in our community is always accessible. This would help the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter provide accurate information for service and funding purposes.

ACTION

As mentioned, funding has been made available through PHIF and HRDC, and a full-time Homelessness Project Coordinator has been hired. The job description for this position includes the preparation of an annual report. Due to the scope of the research and consultation for this Community Action Plan, the report will not be updated this year.

It is important to note that this Plan has only represented the beginning of the work that needs to occur with regard to identifying the issues and needs in our community in relation to homelessness. This work will continue throughout the 3 years of this plan, and the annual updating of this report will reflect the continuing work necessary in this area. **(This Action will proceed in year 1 of the Plan.)**

4.8 Sustainability

Sustainability of the programs developed and funded by the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative has been raised by the community as an issue of concern. How will these programs be maintained when the three-year window of SCPI funding closes?

There are a number of responses to this concern.

1. Because the Community Action Plan is designed to move people along the path of housing to permanent independent living, and to encourage the development of more affordable housing units once the path has been successfully traversed and people are able to acquire and sustain permanent housing, these people will no longer require support by SCPI programs. Therefore, in three years time, a number of people will be able to sustain themselves in housing without community support.

2. Once the systemic issues around poverty and social assistance rates are successfully addressed, the people who rely on social assistance to meet their basic needs will be in a much better position to maintain their housing without SCPI intervention.

3. There are people who will always need to rely on social services to meet their needs, be it for food, housing, support, or counseling. There will always be people, who for various reasons, are unable to live independently without community support. This fact presents a large problem for programs that have a limited time guarantee of funding, because there will always be some need for these services.

   Individual proposals submitted under the SCPI funding should address this issue by declaring where in the system (i.e., other Federal departments, Provincial government, City of Hamilton, local foundations, fundraising efforts) further resources can be acquired to support programs.

   The Federal government should also consider extending and stabilizing funding for programs that address the needs of people who are homeless in our community.

4.9 Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential component of any initiative designed to solve a complex social problem. Without effective evaluation, we could not be sure if the programs developed under the SCPI umbrella are addressing and resolving homelessness in our community. All levels of government should make ongoing commitment to addressing the problems of homelessness in communities, provinces and territories across the county.

An evaluation process for SCPI could take one of two routes:

1. Each project funded under SCPI could include a separate evaluation plan;
2. An evaluator could be hired to assess all the projects funded by SCPI

It is the recommendation of the Community Action Plan that a full-time evaluator be hired and directed by the Social and Public Health Services for the three-year period SCPI is in effect, to evaluate all the programs that receive this funding.

This would result in one consistent and comprehensive evaluation report of the impact of SCPI funding on the Hamilton community that would be easily available and readable by all interested individuals or parties.

4.10 Communication of the Plan

The Plan will be presented to the community at a Community Forum during Housing Awareness Week in the first week of October, 2000; copies of the Plan will be available at the Forum. In addition, an article will be authored to appear in the Hamilton Spectator that week that will introduce the homelessness crisis and part of the substance of this Plan.

The Homelessness Steering Committee will publish the document on the web, and will look into the feasibility of developing an online conferencing site that would enable agencies to dialogue, coordinate, and implement the Plan more efficiently with regard to the Community Action Plan.

Human Resources Development Canada and Social and Public Health Services will be involved in any media activities.

5.0 SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Any discussion of a social problem as complex as homelessness would not be complete without an analysis of how race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age and disability impact on a person's likelihood of becoming homeless, and that person's ability to access services that would resolve their homeless situation. This plan has already noted the relationship between poverty and homelessness, yet the other systemic barriers to housing have not been so clearly detailed.

A useful way to speak of systemic barriers to participation in the community is to identify 'discrimination' generally, since that concept is both the precursor to, and a result of the systemic barriers that many individuals in our society face. Unfortunately, many forms and instances of discrimination occur without comment or notice since they result from our 'normal' habits and our already-existing institutions and practices. 'Discrimination' may refer to 'direct' discrimination as in an explicit declaration that a certain institution does not admit blacks or gays (or more often in the form of harassment or 'slurs') but most often appears in its more insidious and indirect forms such as: institutional or systemic discrimination. All forms offend the 'inherent dignity' of the individual or group as guaranteed in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and are prohibited under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.*

At the broadest level, discrimination is about power, or a lack thereof. We all live in a society where:

> Power is unequally distributed; certain few individuals and groups have a great deal of influence over resources and decision, while larger numbers of individuals and groups have considerably less influence, and a smaller, though significant number of people have virtually no influence at all. *Lee, Bill (1994) Pragmatics of Community Organization, Mississauga: Commonact Press*

People who are homeless have very little influence over the forces that play in their lives. People who are homeless and of a visible minority, aged, or a woman, or a person with a disability, or gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender, (or combinations thereof) have even less power because of the discrimination they face in their everyday lives.

Direct personal discrimination may come in the form of verbal slurs, such as a worker calling an Aboriginal client "chief", physical assault as in the case of other residents of a shelter beating up a gay youth, or from a landlord who denies a young person an apartment because she/he thinks that person will not pay the rent or be a fire hazard.

Systemic discrimination is institutionalized (sometimes unintentional) discrimination resulting from policies, practices and procedures which excludes groups of people with a shared identity. It might take the form of "spouse-in-the-house" legislation that cuts a single mother off of social assistance if she shares accommodation with a man, a lack of affordable housing units that are accessible to people with disabilities, or social services provided only in the dominant language and culture.

In Hamilton-Wentworth, as in any community across Canada, both forms of discrimination exist and create barriers to people trying to access the services that will assist them in resolving the homelessness crisis in their lives. In order to provide effective services to all, it is important that both personal and systemic discrimination be addressed by service providers and program funders. What follows are some introductory comments on a number of identifiable groups that have traditionally experienced personal discrimination and systemic barriers to services and housing. This is certainly a non-exhaustive list, and it is clear that more work needs to be done in this area.

5.1 Immigrant and Refugee Issues

The ethnic face of Hamilton has changed significantly as high numbers of immigrants and refugees choose our community as their own. Hamilton is the third largest entry/choice for Immigrants and refugees in the country, next to Toronto and Vancouver, and Settlement and integration Services Organization (SISO) notes in their "Annual Report: 1999-2000" that "In fact, the number of immigrants and/or refugees in Hamilton is actually larger because statistical reports do not include secondary migration". Hamilton is a particularly popular destination for secondary migration (where an immigrant or refugee moves from their port of entry to a new city) because of our education, low unemployment rates, less expensive housing, and smaller size. Indeed, in 1998-1999 the re-settlement of 750 Kosovar refugees by our community (and particularly SISO) represented the largest re-settlement in Canadian history. Research conducted by SISO indicates that between 1998 and 2000, three thousand primary migrants entered our community, while six thousand secondary migrants also moved into the Region (subsequent research by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada confirmed these numbers).

SISO notes that there have been problems in the past with cultural insensitivity among emergency shelter providers in the community. Similar complaints against Social Public and Health Services were resolved through an open dialogue on solutions between that service and SISO. It is imperative that this identified problem is similarly addressed through a meeting of emergency shelter providers, SISO, and the Homelessness Project Coordinator in the Fall of 2000 as this Action Plan goes to implementation.

Other problems facing immigrants and refugees in regards to housing range from racism when dealing with landlords to the fact that the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal does not arrange for interpreters when needed, relying instead on the legal clinics or the individual. Tenants who might otherwise resolve a dispute with their landlord, are evicted because they could not read the documents served to them by the landlord and the Tribunal. It is hoped that a working group will develop in the community that will discuss systemic barriers and racism with regard to immigrants and refugees, and may provide cultural sensitivity and anti-racism training where needed.

5.2 Women's Issues

As was indicated earlier in the Plan, women are more likely to be poor than men (1996 Census data). This inequality is further compounded by the reality that 85% of all lone parent families are headed by women, and 64% of those families fall below the poverty line. This evidence of systemic inequality is compounded by the horrible levels of domestic violence against women. In relation to homelessness, the realities of poverty can inhibit a woman's ability to leave an abuser, and certainly means that women, particularly single women with children, are often at extreme risk of poverty. Women also find themselves in high risk situations once they leave the shelter because they cannot secure decent and affordable housing. This may mean returning to an abusive partner or entering into a sexual relationship with another man in return for cheap rent. Often these women return to the shelter system again and again because of continued or new abuse and because of the lack of affordable housing. Women may also face a barrier to leaving an abuser when they are required to file a complaint with police before receiving some services, for example, language interpreters.

There is also growing evidence that, as tenant protections have been removed, vacancy rates continue to drop, and many women remain in poverty, some landlords are attempting to exchange breaks in rent or even non-eviction for sexual favours.

This pernicious direct form of harassment is partially the result of a society in which a backlash to the reality of domestic abuse and sexual harassment, coupled with staggering poverty rates among single mothers, means that many women have been marginalized and disempowered.

As noted earlier in the Plan, there is growing evidence that many more women than once thought are homeless. Because of this and the special needs and issues facing women, addressing homelessness means that particular attention must be paid to women's homelessness.

5.3 Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues

People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) often face heterosexism and homophobia (no distinction is made between the two here) at a very early age.

Whether or not that person has 'come out' (and coming out is not a one-time event, but usually happens over a long period of time), they will face a society in which heterosexuality is portrayed as the norm, thereby marginalizing all who do not fall into that category. For LGBT street youth this often means that an individual will retreat into the closet or actively oppress others in order to protect themselves from the abuse that accompanies heterosexism and homophobia. LGBT youth, not surprisingly, have higher rates of suicide and attempted suicide and higher addiction rates than youth that are not LGBT.

People who are LGBT also often experience physical violence due to the ways in which others ignorantly view their sexuality. In addition, religious institutions, although important resources for persons experiencing homelessness, erect barriers if those religious communities actively promote an anti-LGBT environment. The LGBT Focus Group (from whose comments much of this analysis flows) notes that women's shelters in our community are addressing LGBT issues through their Trans-Accessibility Committee which addresses the issue of transgender people accessing the women's shelters, and are also addressing lesbian domestic violence. In light of the direct discrimination against LGBT people by landlords (qualitative evidence indicates that this is quite prevalent due to the fact that the *Ontario Human Rights Code* does not prohibit harassment based on sexual orientation in accommodation), it is necessary that the LGBT working group expand and continue to meet and that the community at large (including front-line staff) work to address LGBT issues through education and training.

5.4 Disability Issues

Persons living with a disability perhaps face the most extensive systemic barriers to their accessing of services and housing. For a person living with a disability, it does not matter how affordable an apartment is, or how well-trained social service staff are, if the services or housing are inaccessible, the person who is living with a disability will never have the chance to find out.

Our community, like every other community, is mostly premised on the assumption that the population is uniformly able, no matter how unsound that premise may be. For a person living with a disability this may mean that they must plan weeks in advance in order to secure transportation if they need to access services or look at housing, or that they move to a new community only to find that there are no apartments available that would be accessible to them.

It is necessary in our community that we support measures that alleviate systemic discrimination on the basis of disability (discrimination that is often invisible to us perhaps because it is so prevalent) by continuing to advocate for new projects that address this massive inequality such as the proposed Freedom House in our community (a proposed barrier-free apartment building for the downtown core that would also offer supports).

The group advocating for Freedom House indicates that there are currently 100 people who are waiting for accessible housing. It is only through projects such as these that our community can begin to address the very real physical barriers, arising from systemic discrimination, that persons who are living with a disability must face everyday.

6.0 ABORIGINAL ISSUES

6.1 Aboriginal

The answers to homelessness are many and at times difficult to define. To deal with specific homeless populations requires even more specific and unique answers and initiatives. Thus when dealing with homelessness in the Aboriginal community it is a challenging, but not impossible task to bring their different and specific concerns into sharper focus.

It was determined that the Aboriginal community needed much more consultation on homelessness. A summer student was hired by the Social Planning and Research Council to look into the homelessness issues facing this group.

"Our Homes and Our Streets: Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth" as well as other reports on homelessness point to poverty as one of the major reasons for homelessness. Well over half of the Aboriginal population live off the reserve and little is known about them by way of geographic and demographic analysis. Overall, Aboriginal people fared lower in employment, education and other socio-economic categories than the general population, provincially, regionally and locally. Subgroups in Hamilton-Wentworth, namely Aboriginal women, youth and the elderly, when compared to Aboriginal males fared even worse. Aboriginal's have higher population growth rates as well as a younger demographic base than the rest of Canada.

Statistics Canada admits it is difficult to obtain accurate demographic profiles of Aboriginal populations when compared to the total Canadian population. A post - censal survey in consultation with Aboriginal groups was conducted to get a more appropriate and detailed picture of the situation. To collect comprehensive information and actual numbers of Aboriginal homelessness is even more problematic than collecting information on the general population who are experiencing homelessness because agencies do not identify Aboriginal clients for various reasons. Response from Aboriginal agencies was also sporadic because of confidentiality issues and lack of resources and expertise to compile this type of data.

However, to obtain a more informed picture of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal in Hamilton, the Social Planning and Research Council held three guided discussions with Aboriginal agencies and two sessions of individual interviews with Aboriginal service providers and individuals using shelters and foodbanks. Some of the key topics covered were statistics and data collecting, hostels and housing, outreach workers and services, crisis intervention teams, street patrols, long term facilities for seniors and the disabled, racism and discrimination.

6.2 Housing

Aboriginal agencies need the tools and resources to effectively deliver appropriate and timely services to their clients who are experiencing homelessness. Recognition of Aboriginal groups to perform these services and mandates should be reaffirmed and acknowledged through cooperation and training with provincial and regional governments and other agencies. An example of this type of cooperation was evident when several Aboriginal organizations agreed to collaborate with the Social and Planning Research Council on statistical and data collection for the Aboriginal community experiencing homelessness. The Council would provide expertise and training in this vital area. This is a good start but more support and encouragement from established institutions and government on capital projects is required. It is important that Aboriginal people be supported when developing emergency shelters and homelessness services for men, women and youth, as well as the elderly and the disabled.

There was a renewed call for an Aboriginal men's hostel to serve the growing number of males, young and old, who have no facility at the present time.

Aboriginal organizations should be able to develop emergency shelters for single adult males and male youth who need shelter, support and guidance in the context of their own culture. Aboriginal housing agencies should also be enabled to develop permanent housing for single natives as a supplement to their program for families.

The Native Women's Centre in Hamilton provides shelters for Aboriginal women and their children in transition from abusive situations, addictions, homelessness and offers a host of other services including counselling in job placements, housing, education, cultural, welfare, Aboriginal rights, and child care.

The present facility is not accessible to disabled clients and is of substandard quality to meet the needs of women seeking a safe and healthy place to stay even temporarily. Major repairs and renovations are needed immediately to bring it up to standard, ideally a new building would be the best solution if not a fiscal reality.

There was some agreement that Aboriginal people are treated differently to their detriment. While doing the key informant interviews and speaking with Aboriginal individuals comments varied. It seemed the less power the individual had the more overt the behavior. One well-spoken female remarked "Very subtle behavior, racism was evident, while apartment hunting the landlord wanted the money upfront before even inspecting the premises."

One middle aged male commented "I'm OK, as long as I stay with my own crowd, landlords will not give me accommodation because they can see I'm from the street".

Nearly all the interviewees experienced racism in one form or another, one young man probably echoed the general comments with his reply, "All the time, they do it so subtly you hardly notice it happening to you, maybe that's why they do it."

Outright racism is hard to detect and explain and is mostly hidden, subtle and systemic. Most organizations are run by time honored practices, originating from their historical experiences, and it is fair to say at times organizational definitions and practices are still founded on stereotypical traits. These realities drive organizational life and mirror the norms of society. One particularly notable instance of this kind of treatment of Aboriginal people is the residential schools the effects of which are still felt today. Their intent was to assimilate, to do away with Aboriginal languages, traditions and beliefs. There is a need to address these problems among former residents, their families and communities, who were in effect made homeless. Aboriginal communities and organizations need supports and remedies to assist in restoring and to rebuilding community life, and funding for treatment of individuals and their families. Housing for Aboriginal men and women that is safe, stable and provides a healthy environment is a major part of the process.

People who are experiencing homelessness also have different needs. Seniors and the disabled in the Aboriginal community have long term care services that need to be examined, to help them live independently. Increased homecare, unit modification and other supports need to be examined to service this particular homeless group.

Funding and programming need to be provided to develop long-term housing for the hard-to-house, in order that Aboriginal seniors and the disabled may develop a stable housing environment.

Another group facing homelessness on a continuing basis are Aboriginal students attending post-secondary institutions. First Nation students face many barriers from culture shock, financial difficulties, isolation, and racism, when leaving home to attend school. The lack of safe supportive housing is a major reason many first Nation students leave school prematurely. The many supports that do exist seem all for naught because of this large gap in First Nations student housing needs. A First Nation student house on residence would provide a culturally supportive environment that would go a long way to helping Hamilton area students to succeed at the post-secondary level.

6.3 Outreach and Support Services

Aboriginal street patrols doing outreach work in large urban centres in Canada have been in operation for some time now. The recognition they receive parallels the amount of funding they receive, which unfortunately sometimes is very little if any at all.

Aboriginal outreach workers need to be funded at the same levels as other outreach workers to be effective in delivering appropriate services to Aboriginal homeless populations who are homeless. Support services need to be implemented such as community gardens and kitchens, cultural teachings and elders, transportation, counselling and referrals for addictions, HIV/Aids education, employment and training. Funding and programming must be provided to develop long-term housing for Aboriginal people who are experiencing homelessness so that they may proceed to a stable housing environment. However, Aboriginal people who are experiencing homelessness require more than housing, they also need personal support and community development, and transportation resources for outreach workers to transport supplies such as medicine, blankets, and food to the hard to reach street population.

Strategies that focus on increasing education training and job opportunities for men and women and especially youths should be established so they can upgrade their skills. Programs that focus on culturally relevant material and basic computer skills are much in demand because of government agencies like Human Resources and Development Canada and Ontario Works requiring some basic computer literacy to access their services. Again, Aboriginal people who are homeless require more than housing they also need personal support and community development.

The state of being homeless inherently means a person is in crisis. The health of homeless populations is generally at high risk; crisis intervention workers are needed to deal with people in volatile situations. In working with Aboriginal persons who are experiencing homelessness, crisis intervention workers need to define and understand the problem from the Aboriginal client's point of view. Aboriginal agencies dealing with homelessness need crisis intervention workers so that they can gauge and ensure client safety and support. Safety can be seen as reducing the physical, emotional, and psychological risk to self and others. Thus, resources such as crisis intervention workers are needed by Aboriginal organizations, who have competency in helping clients who are experiencing homelessness, to explore and unearth options that uniquely apply to the specific crisis being experienced.

6.4 Capacity Building and Sustainability:

Aboriginal people should be free to determine the form of political organization and government that is recognizable and agreeable to them. Aboriginal people need to be recognized in the same manner as the English and French; many First Nations persons believe the Federal Government cannot grant self government since it already exists and they should therefore recognize it. Aboriginal Self-Government can be seen in the context of service delivery at the community level, that is in line with the inherent right to self-governance according to both the pre-European and United Nations definitions.

To this end they need the tools and resources to negotiate new and equal relationships with other levels of governance. The development of consensus on homelessness priorities begins at the community level. Women, elders, elected officials, artists and youth are needed in capturing solutions and agreement on issues like homelessness.

Sustainability means many different things to some people, and it can not always be measured in a financial equation. People who are homeless, and who have little political or economic power, need the combined efforts of many partnerships to help them find solutions for obtaining safe, secure, affordable, adequate, accessible, and permanent housing. The Hamilton Executive Director's Aboriginal Coalition (HEDAC), will take the lead in organizing these initiatives, and aims for a holistic approach to the homelessness crisis. With that in mind, the Aboriginal community will aim for empowerment (for the individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness) and capacity building (for the Aboriginal community), through adopting a dynamic, individual-based approach to the problem, and through developing innovative partnerships. It is hoped that through these strategies the Aboriginal community can increase its ability to communicate and advocate, and to assess its needs in the community and thereby receive realistic funding to that end.

7.0 COMMUNITY MAP

One of the goals of the Community Action Plan to combat homelessness is to develop a community map of services for people who are homeless. This section is an outline of the services that help to meet the needs of people who are homeless. As well, the resources spent on serving people who are homeless will be noted. This map intends to show both community assets and gaps in the services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

7.1 Emergency Shelter Services

Emergency shelters are often, although not always, the first line of action to meet the needs of people who are homeless. In Hamilton-Wentworth there are seven emergency shelters for people who are homeless and three emergency shelters for women and families fleeing domestic violence (although 3 of the 4 Violence Against Women shelters also take women who are not fleeing violence). All told, shelters provide 295 beds for people in our community.

Table 5: Emergency Shelter Services

Name	Description
Salvation Army Booth Centre Men's Hostel	54 beds for men
Mission Services Men's Residence	45 beds for men
Good Shepherd Men's Centre	25 beds for men
Good Shepherd Mary's Place	9 bed for women
Wesley Centre Drop-In	50 mats for men and women
Good Shepherd Notre Dame House	20 beds for youth
Total number of beds	203
Annual Funding	
Provincial/municipal (combined 2000)	3,592,600
Hamilton Community Foundation funding (1999/00)	Notre Dame House: Youth Track Program 20,000

7.2 Violence Against Women Emergency Shelters

There are four Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters in the Region, three of which have mandate to also serve women who are homeless. The Native Women's Centre is unique in that it provides holistic services to Native women in the form of identity and pride in heritage, educational and research programs, shelter and counselling in job placements, housing, welfare rights, Aboriginal rights and life skills training.

Table 6: Violence Against Women Emergency Shelters

Name	Description
Mission Services Inasmuch House	28 beds
Good Shepherd Martha House	28 beds
Interval House	24 beds
Native Women's Centre	12 beds
Total number of beds	92 beds
Annual Funding	
Provincial funding (1999/00)	1,881,720
Total Annual Funding	1,881,720

7.3 Drop-In Centres

Drop-ins provide a place of support and practical assistance (i.e., washrooms) for people who are homeless to access during the day or evening when shelters may not yet be open. Many serve specific populations of people (i.e., women, and youth), while others are open to anyone.

Table 7: Drop-Ins for People Who are Homeless

Name	Description
Wesley Centre	Support, lunch meal, shower and laundry facilities, support staff, used clothing, interdenominational worship, 24 hours
Transitional Youth Program	Support, outreach, meals, job board and computer centre for youth aged 16 to 22 years, afternoon and evenings
Mary's Place	Mornings (Mon-Fri) for women for support, companionship and assistance. Clothing and light refreshments
Living Rock	Hot meals 3 evenings a week, recreation, sports, movie nights, clothing for youth aged 13 to 25 years
Olive Branch Christian Centre	Meals at lunch 4 days/week, counselling, bible study, hygiene products
Roxborough Parc (St. Matthew's House)	Resource centre for parents, caregivers and children aged 0-5 years. Includes drop-in, support, groups, clothing exchange, emergency food
Out of the Cold	Runs Oct - March by 4 churches in core. Overnight facilities available: James Street Baptist, Mon. & Tue. Central Presbyterian Church, Thurs. Church of the Ascension, Sat.

7.4 Second Level Lodging Homes

Hamilton-Wentworth is one of three regions in the province with second level lodging homes, or domicillory hostels. Currently, there are 67 facilities that have subsidy agreements with the region, with the capacity to serve 1115 people through a subsidy agreement. As of July 2000, based on the last inspections, the number of people who were receiving subsidy assistance to stay in a lodging home was 922.

Table 8: Second Level Lodging Homes Program Annual Funding 1999-2000

Provincial	Municipal	Total
$3,541,288	$885,322	$4,426,610

7.5 Transitional Housing

Transitional housing provides a valuable service to people who are leaving the shelter system but have not yet found permanent housing in the community. The three organizations that provide transitional housing in Hamilton-Wentworth serve survivors of woman abuse and their children, and men from the hostel system, yet those are programs that could be expanded as an interim source of housing and support for all people who are homeless.

Table 9: Transitional Housing

Organization	Description	Annual Funding
Second Stage Services	Counselling support and interim furnished housing for 3 months to 1 year. 20 units	Region: 35,400 MCSS: 779 Entrepreneur Program: 16,500 Donations: 129,794
Phoenix Place	Counselling support and interim housing. 10 units	1999 - $111,000 all fundraising 2000- $166,000 ($80,0000 CMHC)
Salvation Army Booth Centre Transitional Housing	20 Rooms for men	
Total units	50	
Total Funding 1999/2000		293,473

7.6 Supportive Housing

Supportive housing programs offer housing and support services such as case management and counseling to people whom otherwise would be unable to maintain housing within the community. For people with mental health issues, life skills needs, etc, supportive housing offers long-term housing while working towards independent living.

Table 10: Supportive Housing

Organization	Description
Sommerville House	Long-term supportive living for women 18 years and older. 12 beds
Brennan House	Residence for street youth, 15 beds

7.7 Food Banks And Meal Programs

Food banks are the other side of the coin in the battle for survival for vulnerable people. When housing takes up the biggest portion of income, food becomes a basic necessity that people who are very poor cannot afford. Food banks and meal programs, by providing this basic necessity, are to some degree enabling people to maintain housing that they would not otherwise be able to hold on to.

There are nine food banks and one food network* which provide service to people in Hamilton-Wentworth. There are 5 meal programs in the community.

Table 11: Food Banks

Organization	Description
Greater Hamilton Food Share*	Emergency food network that procures and distributes donated food to foodbanks and meal programs
Welcome Inn (pantry)	Hours: Mon-Fri. 8:30 - 4:30 pm Food Pantry: Mon./Wed./Thrus. 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Neighbour to Neighbour Centre	Registration: Mon-Fri 9 am-4 pm Food Bank hours: Mon-Thurs 9:30 am - 3:30 pm
St. Matthew's House	Welcome Basket for expectant mothers
Mission Services	Mon./Wed./Fri. 10:00 - noon, and last week of the month
Good Shepherd Centre Family Services	Hours: Mon-Fri 10 am - 12 pm & 1 - 3:30 pm
Flamborough Food Bank	Hours: Monday 7 - 8:30 p.m. & Friday 1 - 3 pm
Stoney Creek Food Bank	Mon 1 pm - 3:30 pm, Wed 9:30 am - 3:30 pm, Fri 9:30 am - 1 pm
Salvation Army Family Services Centre (Hamilton)	Hours: Mon - Fri 10:30 am - 12:00 pm (walk-in) & 1 - 3:30 pm (appointment only)
Salvation Army Family Services (Mountain)	Mon./Wed./Fri. 1:00 - 3:00 pm (walk-in)
Salvation Army Food Assistance (Dundas)	Hours: Tues, Wed, Thurs from 9 - 11:30 am & 1 - 3:30 pm

7.8 Meal Programs

Table 12: Meal Programs

Organization	Description
Good Shepherd Centre	Hot dinner meal served Mon - Sat from 3:30 - 4:45 p.m. for men, women and children
Salvation Army	Van Program goes to 3 locations every night in core area serving soup and sandwiches from 9 - 12, 7 days/week In house 3 meals @ Booth Centre 7 days a week
Wesley Urban Ministries	Hot lunch meal served Mon - Fri from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and Sundays at 4:00 p.m.
Living Rock Ministries	Hot dinner meals in collective kitchen for youth on Tues, Wed, and Thurs at 6:30 - 10:00 p.m.
Olive Branch	Lunch meals served Mon, Wed, Fri & Sun
Out of the Cold	Hot dinner meal served evenings at James Street Baptist on Mon., Anglican Ascension on Sat, and Central Presbyterian on Thurs. St. James the Apostle on Wed. - Soup and Coffee: 4:00 pm Dinner: 5:30 pm

7.9 Finding Housing

- **Housing Help Centre** is a centrally located storefront centre staffed by housing workers providing practical assistance to persons with low incomes or special needs who are homeless or in danger of being homeless and who are looking for affordable housing.

  Annual Budget: 1999/2000 = 274,000 (no federal dollars)
  2000/2001 = 274,000 (no federal dollars)

- **Adolescent Community Care Program** provides housing (temporary and long term accommodation), moving, furnishing, budgeting; life skills; education; resource information, social and recreational programs; and, supportive counselling.

7.10 Maintaining Housing

- **H.E.L.P. (Housing Emergency Loan Program)**
  H.E.L.P. provides interest-free loans to people with one time housing emergencies. It is a local community based initiative that was set up jointly by the Unitarian Church of Hamilton and social service agencies. Multi faith community fundraising, a Unitarian Universalistic Association grant, and a contribution from PHIF have been principal sources of funding so far. PHIF has recently announced funding for administrative staff. 93 loans have been distributed thus far to keep people in their rental Homes. Current resources to date: included in Housing Help Centre's annual budget
- Housing Help Centre
- Hamilton-Wentworth Community Care Access Centre provides one point of access to information and coordinated health and support services. For people considering moving into a long-term care facility the CCAC provides information and help.
- Helping Hands is a Social and Public Health Services program that provides support services for the elderly and disabled, by providing home maintenance, heavy cleaning and lawn maintenance. This allows people who otherwise may not be able, to maintain their homes.
- St. Matthew's Seniors Program

7.11 Help With Evictions/Legal Problems

- **McQuesten Legal and Community Services** provides legal information, advice and advocacy to the community in areas such as the Tenant Protection Act, Ontario Works/Ontario Disability Support Program, and Employment and Labour law (as well as other issues).

- **Dundurn Community Legal Services** provides legal information, advice and advocacy to the community in areas such as welfare, disability, and housing law (as well as other issues).
- **Hamilton Mountain Legal and Community Services** provides legal information, advice and advocacy to the Hamilton Mountain community on tenant rights, workers' compensation, Ontario Works and disability issues (as well as other issues).
- **Housing Help Centre**

7.12 Outreach

- **COAST**: mobile outreach team consisting of a mental health worker and a police officer who respond to crisis calls between 5 p.m. - 1 a.m. daily.
- **Social & Public Health Assertive Outreach Team** - 4 staff cover Mon-Fri 9 a.m. -9 p.m. & Sunday 3 p.m.-7 p.m.
- **Housing Help Centre Outreach Workers** - 1.5 staff, mainly evenings

7.13 Permanent Supportive Housing

- H.O.M.E.S.: (Housing with Mobile Outreach and Engagement Services) program, will house 100 people through Phase 1 funding and hopefully an additional 99 if Phase 2 funding is approved, for people who are homeless and have a severe and persistent mental illness.
  H.O.M.E.S. program includes: Housing Supports Single Room Occupancy (SRO); 10 rooms in Specialized Lodging Home; 20 bachelor apartments; 10 apartments; 33 apartments in various locations in the city
  Annual budget 1999/00 = $1,107,000 (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care)
- **Wesley Community Homes** is a 60 apartment units, 28 townhouses, 5 shared accommodation in houses supported by daily living program - all rent-geared, hard to house population
- **Emmaus Place** is a 65 unit supportive housing project for people with special needs and hard-to-serve clients

7.14 Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund (PHIF)

As a result of the Provincial Homelessness Task Force, PHIF was developed.
Three phases of this program have allocated funding to a variety of organizations since 1998. A total of $728,000 has been allocated by the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth with funding from the government of Ontario. The approved programs included:
- Funding for the extension of hours for the Wesley drop-in to be open 24 hours a day.
- Staffing and loan money support to the Housing Emergency Loan Program (H.E.L.P.)

- Outreach workers at three agencies
- Renovations to emergency shelters
- Enhancements to the emergency shelter services (case management and trusteeship)
- Support to the food line
- Purchase of a refrigerated truck to allow food banks to accept perishable foods
- Funding for a part-time housing co-ordinator

Annual allocation 1999/00 = $304,000

7.15 Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Rent Supplements:

- 252 rent supplements for Hamilton-Wentworth
  - for private rental housing units
  - administered by Housing Authority
  - beginning October 1
  - using CHAN list to fill units
  - 25 supportive housing rent sups. - no details yet

7.16 Programs To Reduce Native Homelessness

As part of the Federal government's homeless initiative announcement in December of 1999, the Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board was allocated $100,000 to help fight homelessness for Native people in Hamilton-Wentworth.

The Board undertook to use the funds to support the operation of already existing services: the Wesley Drop-In Centre, the Native Women's Centre and the Aboriginal Health Access Centre (for outreach work).

7.17 Other Services

- **Living Rock Ministries** is a social recreational program and alternative centre serving street youth and youth coming off drugs and alcohol. Focus is on youth ages 13 to 25 years. The program also operates a Youth Resource Centre, a collective kitchen, free clothing, peer helper training, Summer Youth Project and a follow-up program for young offenders in the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre.
- **Out of the Cold** runs from October to March every year. Participating churches are; Central Presbyterian, Anglican Ascension, James Street Baptist St. James the Apostle. Programs include drop-in and some over-night shelter on mattresses, and dinner served. Programs run once a week per church (James - Monday & Tuesday evening, Anglican - Saturday, Central -Thursday).

- **Living Waters Ministries** is an inter-denominational Christian church with an outreach focus to its community. The ministry provides a food and clothing bank that runs every Thursday afternoon. Appointments for the food bank can be made on Tuesday. Covers the East and Central Hamilton area.
- **Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO)** provides a number of services to newcomers to Canada, including; Settlement Counseling Services. The HOST program, LINC Assessment Centre, employment services, youth program and cultural interpretation and translation services.
- **Men's Detoxification Unit** (Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation) provides direct services for male individuals who are; under the influence of alcohol and or drugs, in withdrawal from alcohol and or drugs, in crisis as a result of alcohol or drugs. All admits are voluntary. Referrals are made locally, regionally and provincially. Direct hospital support is provided for medical and psychiatric emergencies.
- **Hamilton Women's Detox Centre** is a non-medical crisis centre for women who are intoxicated or withdrawing from alcohol or other drugs. The Detox Centre offers a safe, caring atmosphere in which women can detoxify and be referred to community services and addiction treatment facilitates. Referrals are accepted from medical sources, community agencies and family, as well as self-referrals. Outreach services and follow-up group support is available.
- **The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth** is a citizens' organization designed to carry out three basic functions; to conduct research, to promote citizen participation, and work with groups and agencies towards developing an effective network of human services.
- **Hamilton AIDS Network** provides education regarding AIDS and related issues. Services include; one-to-one communication, peer support groups, speaker's bureau, information mail-outs, resource centre, community consultations, information tables, support services and individual bereavement support.
  The VAN Needle Exchange Program operates a street health centre staffed by a public health nurse and a social worker.
- **Adolescent Community Care Program** provides a non-residential support service to special needs youth 16 to 20 years of age. The methods, aims and services are meant to address the concrete survival needs of the youth. It is a "hands-on" approach which has been designed to maximize the limited resources of youth who experience difficulties in adjusting to independent community living. Services include: housing (temporary and long term accommodation, moving, furnishing, budgeting; life skills; education; resource information, social and recreational programs; and, supportive counselling.
- **LINKS Voice Mail Project** provides voicemail boxes to low-income and people who are homeless for a fee of $11 for 3 months. The purpose of this program is to reduce marginalization and systemic barriers to employment and housing.

- **Mary Ellis House** is a residential treatment service home for women with substance abuse problems. The residential program provides a structured 8-week, supportive environment for 8 women. The program includes individual counselling, group work and relapse prevention. Continuing care operates in a group format, one evening per week for 2 years. The program also has 6 beds for post and pre-treatment, which provides residential support services and community withdrawal management from prescription drugs.
- **St. Vincent De Paul Society** offers temporary assistance in the form of food and clothing vouchers to families in distress. This is not a food bank. A needs assessment is conducted by a Vincential from the Conference who may give the person a food voucher redeemable at a grocery store, or a clothing voucher, which is redeemable at St. Vincent de Paul Society stores.
- **Hamilton-Wentworth Community Housing Registry** takes and processes applications for non-profit housing units in the region. The office is a Coordinated Housing Access Network site, which maintains the consolidated waiting list for rent-geared-to-income units in the region.

7.18 Health Services

- **Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre** provides primary health care service for people who are currently unable to get the health services they need and who live in the geographic area bounded by Barton Street, Locke Street, Sherman Ave. and the escarpment. Clients include people who face barriers such as poverty, homelessness, gender, cultural difference, language, mental illness, addictions, unemployment, violence and isolation.
  Annual budget 1999: $954,016 2000: $1,399,029
- **North Hamilton Community Health Centre** provides a team approach to the provision of primary health care services with an emphasis on the broad determinants of heath. Staffed by family physicians, nurse practitioners, other health professionals and support staff.
- **Centre De Sante Communautaire Hamilton-Wentworth, Niagara** serves the Francophone community with the following programs: individual, couple, group and family counselling; support and services for seniors and people with disabilities; services for parents, adolescents and young children; assault prevention programs for women, children and teens; health promotion programs, information, support and advocacy for refugees and immigrants; referral services; prenatal and postnatal classes, support group, grocery vouchers, medical clinic and nutritionist; and, speech and language services

- **The VAN Needle Exchange Program** (Hamilton AIDS Network) operates a street health centre at 195 Ferguson Ave. N. staffed with a public health nurse and a social worker.
- **The Street Health Clinic**
- **DE DWA DA DEHS NYE>S** (Aboriginal Health Centre) is a culture based health care facility designed specifically to meet the needs of Aboriginal people through holistic assessment and services focusing on preventative and primary healthcare.

7.19 Services/Information That Have Been Developed Since 1998

- H.E.L.P.
- H.O.M.E.S.
- "Our Homes and Our Streets: Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth" report
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Rent Supplement Program

7.20 Total Funding Of Community Services For Homelessness

Non-Federal Government funding

The following list of resources in the Hamilton-Wentworth community dedicated to alleviating the hardships of homelessness, is not complete. There are many groups of people and organizations who donate time, energy and money to services for people who are homeless., as well as larger organizations who work on the issue, but whose broader mandate and funding does not allow for a break-out of resources dedicated specifically to homelessness. The legal clinics and health clinics are two examples of organizations whose budgets have not been included in this list for that reason. This list is a compilation of some resources spent in Hamilton-Wentworth in 1999/2000.

The Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) of Human Resources Development Canada, is new federal money dedicated to addressing homelessness. One of the criteria for distributing SCPI funds is a 50/50 partnership of resources between federal dollars and other dollars (provincial, municipal, foundations, fundraising), therefore federal resources spent on homelessness have also not been compiled in this list. The list does not include all the resources spent in the Hamilton-Wentworth Region on homelessness. Because the list was complied to determine if 4.3 million dollars was spent annually (the amount of the 50/50 SCPI partnership agreement), and it quickly became apparent that this was the case, further work was not invested in this component of the plan. That being said, it is important to acknowledge that the Hamilton-Wentworth community invests heavily in time, energy on resources to address homelessness issues.

Donations/fundraising 1999/000	
Salvation Army donations/fundraising 1999/00	$ 683,490
Mission Services donations/fundraising 1999/00	$ 800,000
Good Shepherd Centre's donations/fundraising 1999/00	$ 1,784,187
Wesley Urban Ministries donations/fundraising 1999/00	$ 510,000
Great Hamilton Food Share (donations food) 1999/00	$2,000,000
Neighbour to Neighbour Centre (food raising)	$ 700,000
Housing Emergency Loan Program	$ 20,144
Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund	
Allocations for 2000	$ 304,000
Emergency Shelter Services 2000	$3,612,600
Neighbour to Neighbour Centre	$ 303,000
Violence Against Women Shelters 1999/000	$ 1,881,720
Transitional Housing 1999/00(women and children survivors- domestic violence)	$ 293,473
Housing Help Centre 1999/00	$ 274,000
Second Level Lodging Homes 1999/000	$4,426,610
H.O.M.ES Program	$ 1,107,000
Supports for Daily Living (Wesley Urban Ministries and St. Matthew's House)	$ 302,857
Hamilton Community Foundation Grants 1999/00 (not included elsewhere)	$ 103,961
United Way Grants 1999/00 (not included Elsewhere)	$ 147,191
Total 1999/00 resources on homelessness	**$19,254,233**

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Executive Summary of "Our Homes and Our Streets: Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness has increasingly been identified as a major problem across Ontario. We are seeing larger numbers of youth living in poverty and spending time on the streets. More people with mental health issues are unable to find the support they need to remain connected to social resources and housing. We also know that increasing numbers of people are unable or afraid to leave substandard housing and we are seeing an increase in the numbers of people unable to purchase food because they are paying such a large proportion of their income to rent. It appears that, as we approach the end of the millennium, more and more people in our community are unable to meet their most basic needs of food and adequate, affordable housing.

In response to this increase in public awareness, the provincial government struck a Task Force on Homelessness. The Task Force visited Hamilton in March 1998 to hear from regional government officials, service providers and citizens about their issues and experiences with homelessness in our community. With the release of the Task Force on Homelessness report and "Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto (also known as the Golden Report), a number of housing advocates recognized the need for a broad report on the state of housing and homelessness in the Hamilton-Wentworth community. This included looking beyond the numbers of people using shelters and food banks, to other indicators of risk such as, vacancy rates, hew housing, evictions, poverty, waiting lists for social housing and affordable housing stock. We hoped that such a report would provide us with the information to better understand what is happening in our community, so that we can then inform others including the government about homelessness in our Region.

What We Discovered Bricks and Mortar

1 While there is still a serious affordability problem, the vacancy rates in Centre and East Hamilton are at 5.2% while the vacancy rate in Stoney Creek, Dundas and other surrounding areas is 1.6 (CMHC, 1998). (See Appendix G).

2 By the end of April 1999 there were 3441 people waiting for non-profit housing. Waiting lists are long for people wanting non-profit housing outside of the core while there are quite a few vacancies in the downtown. However there are two downtown projects that have integrated on-site support. These places have low turnover rates and long waiting lists.

3 Between 1994 and 1998 only 18 private rental units were built on an annual average basis. CMHC estimates the increase in tenant households at over 400 annually between 1996 and 2006. These levels of private rental unit development is insufficient to keep up with the demand for housing (ONPHA, 1999).

4 The current rental housing stock is actually decreasing in size because rental units are being converted to condominiums. In the last year, since the introduction of the *Tenant Protection Act* there have been 11 applications to convert 482 units. Before the introduction of the TPA there had been a total of 18 applications to convert 504 units to condominiums.

5 People are also struggling to find affordable, adequate housing. In 1998 the Housing Help Centre had more than 18,000 contacts with people who were homeless or in danger of losing their housing. This was their highest number ever. (HHC, 1999).

6 175 people accessed overnight emergency shelters in the region on a nightly basis in 1998.

Vulnerable People

7 The wide range of vacancy rates in second level lodging homes suggests that some models of supportive housing are more successful than others and creative models need to be explored to meet the needs of vulnerable members of our community.

8 36% of the people who experience homelessness were identified as having a mental illness (Schofield and Cook, 1995).

9 People are being discharged from prison, hospitals and the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital with such speed that they can not be matched with the appropriate and often lacking community resources. This places these people at a greater risk of homelessness.

10 The demand for emergency youth shelter is overwhelming. The one youth shelter in the city is operating at capacity and for 15-16 days of each month it is operating over capacity.

11 17 and 18-year-old youths are extremely vulnerable to poverty and homelessness. This situation is a crisis because recent policy changes to social assistance requirements that include mandatory school attendance. Because of new school zero tolerance policies and the reality that schools will only accept new students at certain times of the year makes it impossible for some youth to attend school and therefore receive social assistance.

Other Services

12 Staff and soup kitchens and foodbanks are concerned that social assistance levels are so low that people are running out of food by the 22nd of each month, every month.

13 People are in desperate need for food each month with soup kitchens and vans serving approximately 19,000 meals in March of 1999 and foodbanks handing out food to approximately 11,000 people during the same time period. A recent study by researchers for Toronto's Daily Bread Food Bank and the North York Harvest Food Bank found that people who are using foodbanks are spending an inordinate proportion of their income on shelter (Saunders, 1999).

14 The numbers of people accessing legal clinics because they are facing evictions has also increased from 615 people in 1995 to 762 people in 1998.

Poverty

15 In 1995, 47% of tenants were paying more than 30% of their income on rent, while 23% of tenants were paying more than 50% of their income on rent. Tenant incomes between 1990 and 1995 fell by 4% while homeowners income increased by 8% (ONPHA, 1999).

16 Homelessness (as defined as living on the street or living in a shelter) is five times more likely to be experienced by men than it is women (Schofield and Cook, 1995).

Conclusion

People throughout our community are facing very hard times. For many, their situations are made worse because they are accompanied by the sense that our governments have stopped caring about the people they serve. This sense was acutely expressed by people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, but frustration and hopelessness were also heard in the voices of overworked service providers, advocates and politicians.

Although this report contains a close examination of the gaps in our system of caring for people, it is important to say that people are doing an extraordinary job of coping in very difficult situations. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are working in creative and collective ways to have their needs met, and service providers have modified the way they serve people to cope with the extreme daily pressures of their work. However, while we note the resiliency, dedication and creativity of community members, we cannot resolve the homelessness problem on our own. It is essential that all levels of government commit to being part of the solution by working with communities across the province and the country to end homelessness.

Appendix B

The Homelessness Steering Committee

The Homeless Steering Committee was a group formed in 1999. It has members from and reports to both the Food and Shelter Advisory Committee of the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC) (formerly Social Housing and Access Committee). This committee was formed in order to liaise between the Food and Shelter Advisory Committee and the continuing work on the "Our Homes and Our Streets" project being undertaken by the Social Planning and Research Council.

The members of the Homelessness Steering Committee are:

- Suzanne Brown, Chair, SPRC
- Jessica Brennan, SPRC, Board Member
- Tom Cooper, McQuesten Legal and Community Services
- Lance Dingman, Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital Patient Council
- Ex Officio - Rosemary Foulds, Social & Public Health Services, Housing and Shelter Branch
- Sherry Lewis, Native Women's Centre
- Posie Poushinsky, District Health Council
- Shelley Remple,/Bob Wood, Housing Help Centre
- Wendy Roy, St. Matthew's House
- Valine Vaillancourt, Social & Public Health Services, Youth & Mental Health Branch Mental Health / Outreach Program
- Madina Wasuge, Settlement and Integration Services Organization

Appendix C

Community Support for the Recommendations

Recommendation #	# of Votes at 1st Forum	# of Votes at 2nd Forum
1	11	0
2^	13	0
3~	7	1
4~	11	12
5	2	
6~	4	
7	3	
8 (combined with 31)	6	
9 (combined with 10)	12	35
10		
11	3	
12~	10	14
13	2	
14		
15	7	
16	2	
17	4	
18~	12	12
19	5	
20~	8	0
21	1	
22~	2	
23^ (combined with 40&46)	9	11
24	12	5
25	6	
26	4	
27	8	0
28	12	2
29	7	28
30	4	
31		
32	13	2
33	4	
34	7	7
35	15	32
36	3	
37	1	
38	6	
39	6	
40^	19	10
41^	15	10
42	6	
43*	6	
44*	4	
45*	8	1
46*^	17	13
47*		
48*	12	1
49*	2	
50*	12	17
51*^	12	9
52*	11	0

~ denotes a recommendation that was modified during community consultation.
* denotes a new recommendation that was created at the 1st Community Forum/Workshop.
^ denotes a recommendation that was changed by the author is consultation with the Homelessness Steering Committee.

Please note that the voting records for recommendation numbers 14 and 47 were lost.

Appendix D

Organizations and Individuals Consulted for the Community Action Plan

Homelessness Forum - Monday October 4, 1999 67 participants

Organizations in Attendance

- Homestart Residential Support Services
- Wesley Urban Ministries (Transitional Youth Program)
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services, Mental Health and Outreach Branch
- Hamilton-Wentworth Residential Care Association
- Alternatives for Youth
- Mental Health Rights Coalition
- St. Matthew's House
- McQuesten Legal and Community Services
- Hamilton Against Poverty
- Good Shepherd Centres
- Wesley Urban Ministries
- Women Against Poverty
- Canadian Red Cross Society
- Voice of Women for Peace: Development and Peace
- District Health Council, Hamilton-Wentworth
- The United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Housing Help Centre
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services, Housing and Shelter Branch
- Salvation Army Booth Centre
- Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital Patient Council
- Hamilton Mountain Legal and Community Services
- Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth
- Hamilton Housing Authority
- Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Kirkendall Neighbourhood Association
- Dundurn Legal and Community Services
- The View, CFMU radio
- Unitarian Church - H.E.L.P. program
- St. Joseph's Hospital
- Youth at Risk
- Centenary United Church
- United Disabled Consumers
- Mixed Company

Individuals in Attendance

- Marvin Caplan - City of Hamilton/Region of Hamilton-Wentworth
- Andrea Horwath - City of Hamilton/Region of Hamilton-Wentworth
- Kim Andriessen
- Leslie Beswick
- Rachell Beswick
- Gary Warner
- Keith McKenna - McMaster School of Social Work (student)
- Carol-Ann Nelson
- Yolisa Nongauza
- Don Kent
- Rebecca and Emily Rainey
- Bob Wood
- Lindsey George

Organizations and Individuals Consulted for the Community Action Plan

Homelessness Forum - February 25th, 2000 79 participants

Organizations in Attendance

- Victoria Park Community Homes
- Good Shepherd Centre
- Residential Care Association
- Human Resources Development Canada
- Good Shepherd Non-Profit Homes
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: Homes for Special Care
- Brant Community Social Planning Council
- Urban Native Homes Inc.
- Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth
- First Place Hamilton
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Appleridge Co-op Homes
- Hamilton Mountain Legal and Community Services
- Urban Core Community Health Centre
- Grace Haven
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth Social and Public Health Services, Housing and Shelter Branch
- Hamilton and District Apartment Association
- Women's Community Cooperative Homes Inc.
- Living Rock

- Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital Patient Council
- Halton Social Planning Council
- St. Matthew's House
- Salvation Army Booth Group
- McQuesten Legal and Community Services
- The United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth Social and Public Health Services, Mental Health and Outreach Branch
- Dundurn Legal and Community Services
- District Health Council, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Wellington Psychiatric Outreach Program
- Hamilton-Wentworth Native Women's Centre
- Housing Help Centre
- Wesley Urban Ministries
- St. Joseph's Hospital - Psychiatric Department
- Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board
- Canada Housing and Mortgage Company
- John Bryden's Office (M.P.)
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services, Mental Health and Outreach Branch
- Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST)
- Unitarian Church
- Assertive Outreach Program, Social and Public Health Services
- Department of Psychiatry McMaster University
- Hamilton-Halton Home Builders Association
- Hamilton Housing Authority
- City of Hamilton Planning and Development Department
- Canadian Red Cross Society
- Greater Hamilton Food Share
- Mission Services
- Good Shepherd Non-Profit Homes

Individuals in Attendance

- Andrea Horwath - City of Hamilton Ward 2 alderman
- Bill Mederios
- Bob Wood
- Carol-Ann Nelson
- Sarah Todd
- Theresa Hale - nursing student McMaster University
- Ruth Redekop - nursing student McMaster University
- Greg Reilly - nursing student McMaster University
- W. Murrey McColloch -check name
- Jessica Brennan
- John Schalkwyk
- Don Kent
- Anthony Campbell

Organizations and Individuals Consulted for the Community Action Plan

Homelessness Forum - April 11th, 2000 58 participants

Organizations in Attendance

- The Living Rock
- Good Shepherd Centre
- Hamilton-Wentworth Residential Care Association
- District Health Council, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Wesley Community Homes
- St. Matthew's House
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Homes for Special Care
- Brant Community Social Planning Council
- Settlement and Integration Services Organization(SISO)
- Canadian Red Cross Society
- North Hamilton Community Health Centre
- Hamilton Housing Authority
- First Place Hamilton
- Housing Help Centre
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Hamilton Mountain Legal and Community Services
- John Bryden's Office (M.P.)
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services, Housing and Shelter Branch
- Hamilton Cultural and Ethnic Mosaic Association
- Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital Patient Council

- Good Shepherd Centre, HOMES project
- Salvation Army Booth Group
- Housing Emergency Loan Program (H.E.L.P.)
- Wesley Urban Ministries
- Dundurn Legal and Community Services
- District Health Council
- Wellington Psychiatric Outreach Program
- Hamilton-Wentworth Native Women's Centre
- St. Joseph's Hospital, Psychiatric Department
- COAST
- Mental Health Rights Coalition
- Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth
- Mission Services
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services, Mental Health and Outreach Branch
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services, Nutrition Branch

Individuals in Attendance

- Anthony Campbell
- Bill Mederios
- Carol-Ann Nelson
- Greg Reilly, nursing student McMaster University
- Jessica Brennan
- Margaret Reid
- Ruth Redekop, nursing student, McMaster University
- W. Murray McCulloch
- Wey Robinson

Focus Groups

- Woman Abuse Working Group July 18th, 6 participants
- Transitional Youth Drop-In August 23rd, 6 participants
- Notre Dame Youth Group August 23rd, 8 participants

Key Informant Interviews with Consumers

- Wesley Centre Drop-In, August 8th, 11 interviews
- Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, August 18th, 10 interviews

Visits to Organizations/Committees

- Mission Services
- Housing Help Outreach
- Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition, August 9
- Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre
- Settlement and Integration Services Organization
- Housing Help Centre
- Greater Hamilton Food Share
- Good Shepherd
- Salvation Army
- Solutions for Housing Action Committee (SHAC)
- Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter

Town Hall Presentations

Town Hall Forum July 18th, 2000 50 participants

Joint HRDC/SPRC: Homelessness Steering Committee presentations on SCPI and the draft priorities for the Community Action Plan.

- Wesley Urban Ministries
- YWCA
- Hamilton-Wentworth Coalition for Social Justice
- Hamilton-Wentworth Residential Care Association
- Hon. Sheila Copps Office
- Development Council
- St. Matthew's House
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services
- CHML
- Solution for Housing Action Committee (SHAC)
- Hamilton Out of the Cold program
- City of Hamilton
- Wesley Community Homes
- Hamilton-Wentworth Housing Authority
- Sacajawea Non-Profit Homes
- North Hamilton Community Health Centre
- City of Hamilton, Social and Public Health Services, Housing and Shelter Branch
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- The United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Department of Canadian Heritage
- Hamilton Community Foundation
- Hamilton Regional Indian Centre

- Hamilton Against Poverty
- Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre
- Urban Native Homes
- District Health Council, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Stan Keyes Office
- United Steel Workers Local 1005
- Good Shepherd Centre
- Housing Help Centre
- Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Mission Services
- McQuesten Legal and Community Services
- Centenary Church
- Status of Women Canada
- Social Planning and Research Council
- Concerned citizens

Town Hall Presentations

Town Hall Forum August 3rd, 2000 47 participants

- Hamilton Apartment Association
- Native Women's Centre
- Mental Health Rights Coalition
- Amity Goodwill
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Department of Canadian Heritage
- Industry Education Council
- Citizen Action Group
- Good Shepherd Non-Profit Homes
- Housing Emergency Loan Program (H.E.L.P)
- Hamilton AIDS Network
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth/City of Hamilton, Social and Public Health Services
- Schizophrenia Society of Ontario - Hamilton Chapter
- Hamilton-Wentworth Residential Care Association
- Wellington Psychiatric Outreach Program
- Living Rock Ministries
- Hamilton-Wentworth Community Care Access Centre
- Social Housing and Access committee
- Dundurn Community Legal Services
- Human Resources Development Canada
- New Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Housing Help Centre

- United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth
- Mohawk College
- Salvation Army
- Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, Social and Public Health Services
- First Place
- Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO)
- Good Shepherd Centre
- City of Hamilton - Alderman Caplan
- Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth
- Concerned citizens

Appendix E

Issues for Next Plan

- Services for diverse communities
- Health Issues
- Racism
- Including anecdotal evidence
- Chart break-out for all recommendations (add lead group category)

9.0 References

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(1999) *Supported Housing for People with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness: A Plan for Hamilton-Wentworth.* Housing Development Group.

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(2000) *Vacant Rental Market Study: Eleven Year Summary, Data 1990-2000.* The Housing Help Centre